

# BEADLE'S

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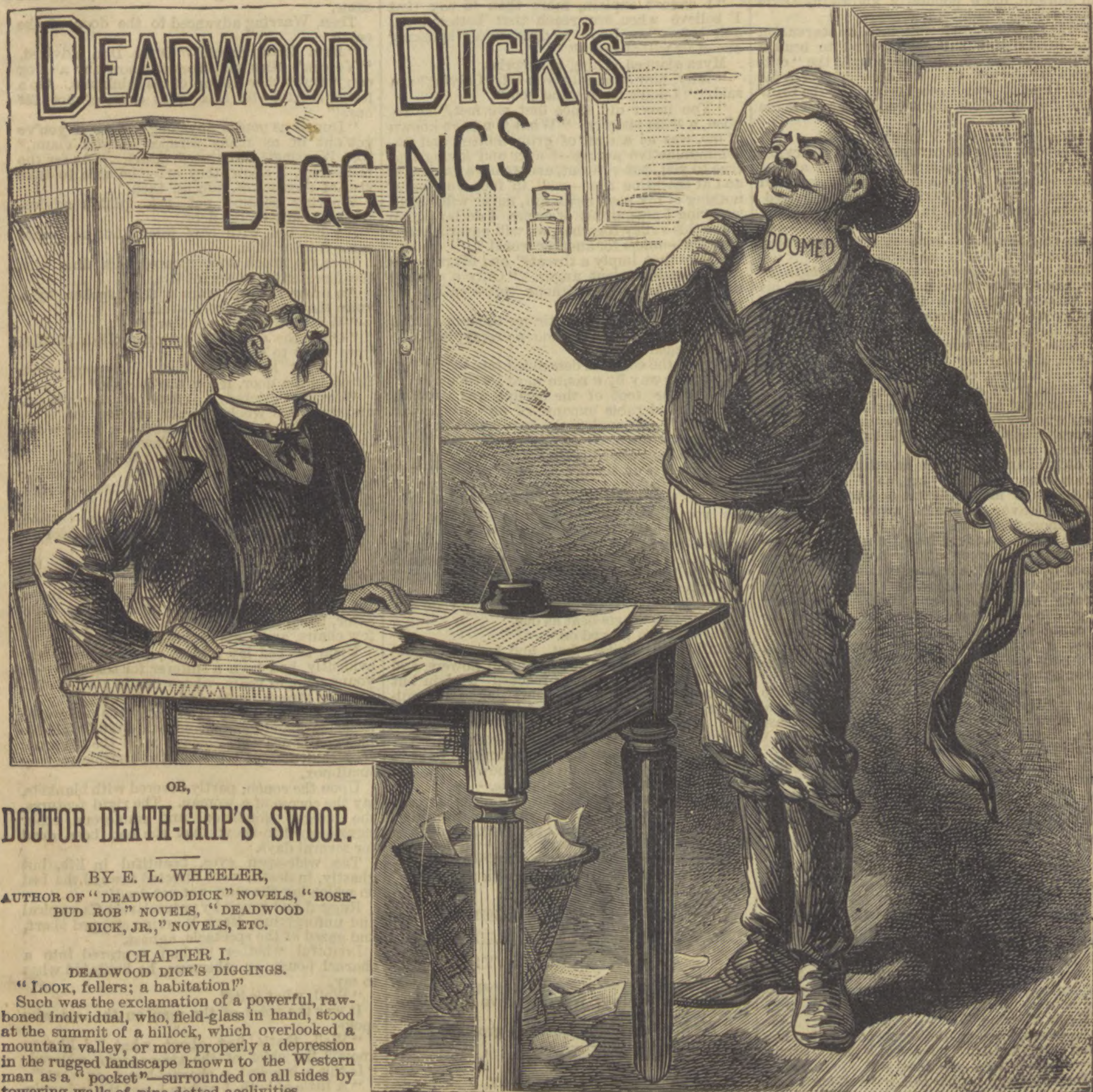
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OR,

### DOCTOR DEATH-GRIP'S SWOOP.

BY E. L. WHEELER,

AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, "ROSE-  
BUD ROB" NOVELS, "DEADWOOD  
DICK, JR.," NOVELS, ETC.

## CHAPTER I.

## DEADWOOD DICK'S DIGGINGS.

"Look, fellers; a habitation!"

Such was the exclamation of a powerful, raw-boned individual, who, field-glass in hand, stood at the summit of a hillock, which overlooked a mountain valley, or more properly a depression in the rugged landscape known to the Western man as a "pocket"—surrounded on all sides by towering walls of pine-dotted acclivities.

At the brow of this hillock, a wagon-train had come to a halt, and, surrounded by several other

"DOOMED!" IT APPEARED THERE AS PLAINLY AS WHEN FIRST IT WAS STAMPED ON HIS WHITE FLESH BY THAT TERRIBLE DEATH-GRIP.



men, it was the guide who had made the observation above mentioned.

The train in question was a "stampede"—or, in other words, a body of starved-out miners, male and female, who had "lifted" their last camp, and struck out for fairer fields and pastures more enticing.

There were a score of vehicles, of various patterns, drawn by ill-fed equines; there were a dozen women, and thrice that many men; and then, again, there was a distressed conglomeration of household furniture, portable mining implements, and provisions—the latter decidedly in the smallest features quantity.

In fact, the hard-lined features of the males, and the thin, pinched faces of the females, betokened that prosperity must have been for a considerable time a stranger to them—the strong-limbed men, in particular, having a fierce, desperate aspect.

Only one in the lot had a cheerful, smiling and sanguine expression; she the youngest, and by far the prettiest—a maiden of some eighteen years, with a form of rare perfectness and a face of exceeding beauty and purity.

The conductor of the train was one of the oldest of Arizona guides—a man who, for two decades, had spent his life in the same calling—Dan Morgan, more popularly known as Dixie Dan, from his Southern parentage.

It was he who, wandering into the starvation camp of Tribale, had volunteered to head a stampede to a place where he thought the "outcroppings" showed unmistakable signs of a fat "lead," and it was upon arriving at the brow of the hill, as before mentioned, that he made the exclamation:

"Look! fellers; there's a habitation!"

For several days the caravan had been trying to work out of a mountainous region of almost endless solitude. It was a tramp of disheartened men and of more dispirited women. Indeed the only hopeful spirit in the crowd was Myra Warring, the affianced of Cal Clinton—he, young, intelligent and handsome, and yet voted the "sourest" man in the company.

Those who had known him for any length of time, and they were not many, believed that his past was overhung by a cloud that made such a thing as pleasantry a grim mockery.

Still, in his way, he was all devotion to Myra, and his life seemed wrapped up in her.

Myra, the daughter of gruff Old Mark Warring, was a streak of sunshine to the stampedeers and when, from pangs of actual distress, they grew vengeful and fierce among themselves, she it was who, by persuasion, gave them hope and encouragement, and urged them on through that dreamless solitude.

Watchful and alert as a haunting spirit, Cal Clinton was ever near her, as if fearing she would escape his vigilance, or that some one would endeavor to snatch away the prize he valued more than life.

Myra stood beside Dixie Dan when he announced the discovery of the habitation, as he termed it, and took his glass to contemplate the place and its surroundings.

Pretty was the pocket, resplendent with *flora*, and golden-hued in sunshine, with one solitary log cabin near its center, past which fiercely rushed a turbulent mountain stream, which, leaving the pocket, disappeared through an ominous-looking chasm.

"Yes, it is a cabin, but I see no signs of life about it," Myra said, scanning the solitary home.

"I presume it is as fruitless a hope as our last claim. Some one has come and gone again."

Dixie Dan shook his head.

"I reckon not," he said. "I war through hyar a year ago, when ther weren't any cabin thar, an' the croppin's were great, but I had hold of a better lead then, and couldn't afford to stop. Like 'nuff some chap have dropped in, sized the slope, an' sayin' nothin' to nobody, started inter biz fer his own self. In that case—"

"We'll tell him to go. If he refuses, we'll send him!"

The man who uttered this was Myra's father—a gaunt, hard-visaged person, whose every expression seemed to indicate that the world had indeed "soured on him."

Virtually, he was commander of the caravan, and few but feared to cross him. Even Dixie Dan, stalwart and a very tiger in a fight, seemed in no wise inclined to pick a fight with bluff old Mark Warring.

"Supposing, father, that some poor fellow has staked out this claim," remarked Myra; "surely you would not drive him from it?"

"Necessity of a people will drive them to do anything," was the grim reply. "We are a people, and I'll be—"

"Sh! father! Didn't you promise me?"

"True, child; but even promises must be broken in face of starvation. But, move on, guide; we'll see what we've got before us. If gold, or silver, we'll tarry!"

So the caravan moved on.

Silent, sober-faced, and to one of pleasant temperament, strangely grim Calvin Clinton rode beside Myra Warring.

Light-hearted, vivacious and high-spirited, Myra drank in the glorious vision as they descended the slope.

"Isn't it glorious,—the view, Mr. Clinton?" she asked.

Everybody in the stampede called him "Mr. Clinton," because there seemed to be an air of mystery clinging to him, and because it was a private belief that he carried a considerable sum of money about his person. Without cause, perhaps, every one seemed to think that he had wealth even beyond this.

In answer to Myra's interrogative, Clinton replied:

"Well, perhaps it will satisfy the others, but as for me, I wish they had struck the other trail, and never come near this place. I have a feeling, a premonition, perhaps, that the *glorious vista* before us, has no luck for you or me."

"Why not, Calvin?"

"I cannot explain, more than to say that I believe when we reach that bottom-land, and before we leave it, figuratively speaking one of us will be dead."

Myra glanced at him, in surprise.

"Why, how strangely you talk, Calvin!" she said. "I don't understand you."

"You never did, since first we met," he replied, a trifle bitterly. "What you have known of me, was as a man of grim, morose and uncommunicative nature—tender and loving and true to you, but reticent, unobtrusive to others, and at the same time—well, in fact, you know nothing of my past, never did, never will. Still, swearing I am guiltless of crime, I declare if we enter this valley together, we will never leave it together—unless for another world."

"Does that imply a threat?" and Myra's eyes flashed with evident anger. "Only a coward threatens a lady, without provocation or reason."

Her reply seemed to stir up thought in Cal Clinton's mind, for he made no reply, but rode on in dogged silence.

Slowly the caravan descended into the pocket, picking its way by a route most tortuous.

When the foot of the decline was reached, and a considerable expanse of flower-bedecked "bottom," surrounded the travelers, Cal Clinton turned abruptly to Myra, the two being slightly advance at the time.

"I trust, dear Myra," he said, "that you will forgive what you construed as an implied threat. You know I love you, and rather than see you pledge to another the affection and hand you have pledged to me, I don't know what I might not be tempted to do—commit suicide, perhaps. But, we won't think of such things. I know you will be true to me, Myra."

"Calvin, I will!"

Two hands warmly clasped, as they rode side by side; two hearts beat as one.

The caravan moved on.

Ruthlessly horses' feet and heavy wagon-wheels crushed down the mountain flowers, and at last the lone cabin was reached—a plain but substantial structure, not uninviting to the trail-worn traveler, yet no sign of life existed about it.

The door was closed; the latch-string in.

Two windows near the eaves admitted light to the interior of which no view, however, could readily be gained from the outside.

Deep, narrow, fierce, the mountain stream rushed past, within a few yards of the cabin door, splashing and surging against the banks, as if angry at its confinement.

Unpretentious though the cabin was, an upright post near its door supported a sign-board, bearing the following:

DEADWOOD DICK'S DIGGINGS.

NO TRESPASSERS ALLOWED HERE.

PRIVATE PROPERTY!

Which the stampedeers read with expressions of interest, while Mark Warring gave a grunt of surly disapproval.

"We shall see about that!" he growled.

## CHAPTER II.

### A CASE OF SMALL-POX.

MARK WARRING was a man, who, in days of prosperity, would have cut his right hand off, rather than stoop to a deed of meanness; but,

drifting West, adversity had haunted his footsteps so persistently that driven oftentimes to desperation, his fine sense of honor had been so dulled that he at times seemed a very ruffian. With naturally a good heart he loved his charming daughter devotedly, and often yielded a trifling point to her entreaties; but, once his mind was made up, his purpose was as firm as adamant, and no argument could change it.

"We'll dismount, boys," he said, "and see what the place looks like, and if there's a ghost of a show of striking a lead, hereabouts, we're the ones that need it most. Here we are, nigh on to starvation, and it don't stand to reason we order starve, jest for sake of one or a half-dozen chaps, whoever they may be. Hyer's the hull of us as hev clung together, fought together and whacked up equal, for over'n two years; shall we split an' starve, just fer sake o' lettin' some one else makin' a monopoly ov the good things of this hemisphere?"

"No!"

Like a roar of thunder, almost, came this reply from that hungry-eyed, gaunt gang of stampedeers.

"No! Never!"

With that, Mark Warring slid from his saddle, which was a signal for others to do the same.

Then, Warring advanced to the door of the cabin.

"Be a leetle careful!" Dixie Dan advised. "Ye can't allus sumtimes tell how fur a frog can jump by ther size-up of his shinbones. Go a leetle keerful—fer ther gal's sake, ef not fer ours!"

"Dunno as you've anything to fear if you've got out of as many scrapes as you claim," was Warring's ill-natured retort. "As fer the rest—why, I allow they orter be able to take keer of themselves, now an' then!"

Warring heeding not the guide's advice, rapped loudly on the door.

All listened, with ears intent, but no sound came from within.

Then the knock was repeated, this time with the force of his powerful fist.

An answer came from within, spoken by a voice that was evidently weak.

"What's wanted, out there?"

"Open the door!" Warring replied, gruffly, "we want to see you."

"I can't leave my bed. I'm very sick. Break in the door, if you are friends."

Warring uttered a grunt of disapproval, and threw his whole weight against the door. It was not a strong affair, and the lock on the interior gave, and the door flew open.

Warring then stepped within the cabin.

The others of the stampedeers, were not so bold, for they remained on the outside, craning their necks forward to peer into lone abode.

From the interior, when the door was opened, floated out upon the air, the peculiar odor of the sick-room.

What Mark Warring saw, on entering the room, was as follows:

The habitation consisted of one large room, the furnishing of which was of a meager character, being simply a bed, a lounge, a table, a few chairs, and some cooking utensils.

Upon the bed lay a man, pale and wan, who evidently had been a sufferer for some time—a young man, in years, who, when in good health, must be strong, agile, and good-looking.

Now, however, bolstered up by the pillows, he looked strangely gaunt and wild-eyed, while his face and hands were covered with the deep red spots that always indicate that terrible malady small-pox.

Upon the couch, partly covered with blankets, lay the corpse of a woman. The rigid features, the bloated condition, and numerous other signs seemed to show that she had been dead for several days.

The wide-open eyes, beautiful in life, but ghastly, in death, were directed toward the bed on which lay the man, not yet dead!

Rugged and rough by nature's rebuffs, cynical and unforgiving, Mark Warring stopped short, and gazed at the spectacle, aghast.

Doubtful whether he had ventured into a charnel house, or otherwise, he hesitated what to say.

"Well, what is it?"

It was the voice of the man on the bed who spoke.

"Well, that's just about what I'd like to know!" the chief of the stampedeers declared. "Is this a hospital, a charnel-house, or what?"

"A little of both, I reckon," was the sad reply of the bed-ridden invalid. "Yonder lies my wife, Nola, cold in death—dead these two days. Both of us were taken down about at the same



time. She died; I have lived, thus far. Would to God I had died with her. After her death, I managed to drag her from this bed to where she lies now. Since then I have been too weak to leave my couch, even to get a mouthful of food."

The eyes of the sick man feasted upon the face of the stranger inquiringly, as if eager to know whether he were a friend or an enemy.

The face of Mark Warring, however, remained perfectly impassive.

"What's yer name?" he demanded.

"Richard Bristol."

"And you're the chap whose handle is painted on the sign outside?"

"The same."

"How long you been here?"

"But a short time."

"S'pose you reckon to claim these parts around heer, eh?"

"I do. The land comprising five hundred acres, surrounding me, are mine by right of purchase from the Government."

"And there's gold hyer?"

"I don't know. I have never found any, but before I was taken sick, I was in hopes of finding some pay-dirt."

"Then why'd ye put up 'Deadwood Dick's Diggings,' and warn trespassers to keep off? Oh! ye can't fool me, me boyee! There's gold hyer, an' I know it!"

The sick man braced up a trifle on the pillows, and an angry light entered his eyes.

"Well, what if there is?" he demanded, his tone growing stronger.

"A good deal!" Old Mark replied. "Thar's a party of us, outside, what hev been starved out of camp, up Nor', an' ef thar's any show fer pay-dirt heer, an' you're agreeable, we'll squat."

"I'm not agreeable," Deadwood Dick, Junior, replied decisively. "What gold, or other ore, there may be in this Pocket belongs to me, and I will not tolerate trespass. I think I have passed the crisis of my disease, and though I've lost my wife, and in other ways sufered the most terrible tor tures, I think I shall recover to make this place my home. So if you are humane, you will pass on, and leave me to myself and my sorrows."

"Humph! not much!" Old Mark grunted. "Ef yer ain't willin', why, that's all right, anyhow. We're goin' to squat right in this Pocket, an' see what it's good fer. An', ef ye don't like et, ye kin lump et. Ye don't luk as ef ye were long fer this life, anyhow, an' ef you croak, no one's got a better right here than I an' my gang. What's yer sickness, anyhow?"

And Old Mark stepped a little nearer the bed, for his eyesight was not of the best.

"Small-pox!" came the answer, and in a sepulchral-like tone that was chilling in its horrible suggestiveness.

Mark Warring leaped back, with an oath.

"Small-pox!" he gasped.

"Just so!" and the light in the invalid's eyes became a trifle brighter and more triumphant. "My wife died of the disease, and I have just escaped death. I have a strong constitution, and have confidence that I will eventually recover!"

"Maybe!" Warring assented; then turned abruptly, and left the cabin, closing the door after him.

Dick's bed being in the rear of the room, the conversation could not be readily heard by those on the outside, if indeed, they caught any of the words spoken.

Old Mark's face was grim, and troubled, when he confronted his associates, but he said:

"Et's all right, boyees. Feller sick in there, but don't reckon he'll last long, and he's no objections to our pitchin' our camp here in this Pocket. So, drive across the way, over the creek—thar's a fordin' place yonder, an' fix things comfortable fer the night. To-morrow, we'll look for signs. You'd all better fight shy of the cabin, lest ye don't want to ketch the small-pox. As fer me, I've hed et, and ain't afeard. So I'll look out fer the chap, 'til he kicks. Then, I'll plant him burn the cabin, an' the disease won't spread. Light out, now, and don't get too cluss to me, until I've had a chance to disinfect my clothes. Smoky Sam, you kin stay along with me, and lend a hand. You've no fear, cause you've had the disease."

Smoky Sam, one of the hardest characters in the half-starved crowd, nodded assent, and dismounted, giving his horse to one of the stampedeers to take into camp.

With considerable alacrity the caravan began to move away toward the ford, for the very words *small-pox* inspired many of them with positive terror.

Myra Warring lingered behind, a solicitous expression upon her pretty face.

"Papa, let me remain and help to nurse the sick man," she pleaded. "You know I nursed you, when you had the small-pox, and never caught it. Perhaps I could fix him something that would give him strength and he would get better."

"No! You go on with the train, and, mind you, stay with 'em and don't show yourself this side the creek. The cabin, hyer, is no place for such as you. Go, I say! We'll tend to the feller—me an' Smoky."

So Myra rode away, but there were tears in her eyes as she went.

Hers was a tender heart, easily touched by a rude remark.

When she was gone, Mark Warring glanced at the sky, which was becoming overcast with ominous clouds, and then turned to Smoky Sam.

"It's lucky et's goin to rain!" he observed.

"Why?"

"Because there's work for you and me to do to-night, me boyee; and if I mistake not, there's money in it, too."

### CHAPTER III.

#### AN INHUMAN ACT.

The two men stood outside the isolated cabin, and watched the wagon-train wind away, pass the creek, and at length come to a halt where all could camp without danger of being struck by a breeze coming from in the direction of the small-pox abode.

The wagons were corraled in a semicircle, the animals turned loose to graze, and soon, here and there, little white tents dotted the green-sward, and other evidences of camp-life were to be seen.

"What ye goin' to do to-night, boss?" Smoky Sam demanded, looking back over his shoulder at the cabin.

Mark Warring shrugged his shoulders significantly.

"Waal, I'm goin' to do suthin' I never did afore, an' yet an act o' charity. You know how the stampede is fixed—no money, no luck, no prospects, no chuck. Somethin's got ter be did, an' that right soon, too. Ther' ain't a day's rations in the crowd, an' when et comes to starvation, it aire natteral for any man to get desprit. A person's conscience kin stand it longer without nourishment than his stomach. Ain't that so?"

"I should smile!" Smoky assented, a grim, greedy glitter entering his eyes.

"Waal, heer we aire, in a purty Pocket, whar game is likely to be plenty in the neighborhood, and whar Dixie Dan says we're likely to strike rich pay-dirt, even ef we don't touch up a fat 'lead' or two. In that cabin is a dead woman, and a man who says he owns all the territory around heer. He's on his last bed with small-pox, too, and he's got the cheek to order as off his claim! What d'yer think of it? Shall we pull stakes an' go, jest because he says so?"

"Nary's the time!" Smoky Sam decided promptly. "Ef thar's gold heer, no one's got so good a right to et as we, who hev families to support."

"Just so!" Jest so! Old Mark acquiesced; "an' bein's the feller aire got the small-pox, an' can't git well, and aire a nuisance in danger o' spreadin' the disease to our families, I opine we're in duty bound to take some measure o' getting rid o' him."

"That's just my think, too, but some o' the party might kick on et!"

"Let 'em kick! It's none o' their business, anyhow! We're a-stayin' heer to nuss the sick man. If he has disappeared in the mornin', we can say he kicked the bucket, an' we buried him. We'll throw up some dirt, somewheres in the vicinity, to make a showin' fer a grave, an' that'll be the end of it. You kin have the cabin, as you won't be afeard to live in it."

"Nary! I wouldn't be afeard to live in a small-pox hospital!" the ruffian replied. "But, what yer goin' to do wi' the feller—knife him!"

"Oh! no," Warring replied, with a shake of his head. "I don't want his life on my hands."

Then he looked once more inquiringly toward the sky.

It was close to sunset, and the overcasting clouds were already causing dusky shadows to creep down into the Pocket. There was every indication thas the night would be dark and stormy.

"It will be pitch-dark to-night," Old Mark continued, "an' no one in the camp can see what's going on over heer. You see the boat yonder?"

"Yas."

"Waal, we'll just chuck the galoot and his dead wife inter that, and send 'em down stream. The current is swift enuff to carry them away a-kitin', an' there's little danger o' the feller's ever livin' to get back here. If he does, we can easy doctor *his* case."

"Better give him the knife!" Smoky Sam said, advisingly. "It's safest, an' then we're sure we're rid of him!"

"No! there must be no blood shed!" replied Old Mark. "I am averse to that. But we can get rid of the fellow by setting him adrift in the boat, an' ef he ever should come back, there's no chance fer to say we tried to murder him. We found him a nuisance, and dangerous to our families, and deemed best to send him away from here. See?"

"Well, you're doin' it, not I!" was the reply. "I know blamed well what I'd do if it was me. But, sail ahead. Et's none o' my pie. Mebbe the chap's got some boodle in the shebang? If he has, it's mine, or part of it."

"Not the hull of it, ner more'n half!" was the reply. "Come, let's go inside."

This they did, and reclosed the door, but they found it so dark that a lamp had to be lit to afford them light.

"Well, what do you want?" Deadwood Dick, Jr., asked, as soon as they had lit the lamp.

"Oh! we just dropped in to keep you company," Old Mark replied. "Didn't know but you'd be lonesome."

"I prefer to be alone," Dick said, wearily. "I do not regard you as friends, and do not feel like having company, anyhow."

"Why do you not regard us as friends?" Old Mark demanded, gruffly, as he and Smoky Sam seated themselves, and lit their pipes.

"Because I see you intend to usurp my rights by remaining in the valley."

"Pshaw! ye mustn't let that sweat you. Ye'r goin' ter kick the bucket, anyhow, an' arter you're gone up ther flume, no one's got a better right to ther lay-out than we hev!"

"I'm not dead, nor do I expect to die, yet awhile, so you are reckoning without your host!" Dick replied, raising himself a little higher on the pillows. "This property, known as Deadwood Dick's Diggings, is personally my own, and I mean to hold it."

"Waal, I reckon you'll get left on that," Old Mark returned, "fer we've come to locate in this hyer gulch, and we've come to stay, at that!"

"What do you mean?"

"We mean that we're goin' to build up a town here, and as we've most of us got families, it won't be safe fer us to have any small-pox around. So, to-night, arter dark, we're goin' to pack you off down-stream, in yer boat, and if you ever show up around here again, it will be worth your life. We don't want ter do ye no outright harm, you see, but we've decided you've go, an' as ye ain't able to foot it, we'll place the boat at yer service."

"You inhuman devils, would you place a man too ill to help himself, at the mercy of that wild stream? Why, I will be drowned before I've gone a mile!"

"That's yer lookout, not ours. Might as well drown as die of small-pox, anyhow!" was the heartless response.

Dick's eyes flashed with bitter indignation.

"You are an infernal pair of wretches," he declared, "and if you subject me, helpless as I am, to this inhuman treatment, my curse rest upon you!"

"Humph! You needn't put yourself out of breath, for we don't keer a fig fer yer curses. You've got ter go, an' that's all there is of it, so ye might as well settle yer mind ter take things as they come. Ef ye say so, we'll bury yer wife afore we send you off, or, if you like still better, we'll send her along with ye."

"By all means, let her remains accompany m if you intend to carry out your inhuman purpose; but, mind you, if you do commit this indignity, you pronounce your own doom, for, by the God in heaven! I swear I will come back, and wreak vengeance on you and yours. I'll make you wish you'd never lived to see the day you and your gang came to Deadwood Dick's Diggings!"

Stern and clear the invalid uttered these words; then, faint and exhausted from the effort, he sunk back upon the pillows.

Mark Warring glanced at Smoky Sam, and gave vent to a sarcastic laugh.

Smoky did not laugh, but seemed inclined to regard Dick's threat in a different light than did his companion, for he looked rather grim, and remained silent.

"I allow there ain't much danger o' yer ever comin' back to do any one any harm!" Old Mark added. "And since a dead man has no use for



money, if you'll be kind enough to tell us where you keep your valuables, we will take charge of them for you, so that in case you ever do come back, they will be in safe keeping for you."

"Oh! no doubt but what they'd be safe, if you got hold of them, you human wolf!" Dick replied, bitterly. "If you would add robbery to your other plans, however, you'll get handsomely left. If I have any valuables, they're put where you'll never get at them!"

"We'll see about that!" Old Mark retorted. "Come ahead, Smoky, and we'll search the premises. If the cuss is worth anything at all, we'll find it, if we turn the hull shebang upside down!"

Both men accordingly arose, and began the search.

First they examined Dick's clothing, which hung upon a chair, near the bed, and nothing but a gold watch and a few dollars in silver was obtained.

"There's more'n this somewhere!" the stamper chief declared. "Look sharper!"

Other places were searched, but nothing was found.

Deadwood Dick watched the proceedings, too full of indignation for utterance.

As for Warring, he appeared to grow enraged at not finding a large sum of money.

"Cuss the luck!" he growled. "Thar's money somewheres, an' I'll swar to et! Fellers what sports around gold watches and sech, ginerally have money. Let's search the corpse!"

"You infernal demons! Dare to defile that lifeless body by the slightest touch, and I'll tear your hearts out, and grind them under foot!" fairly shrieked Dick, now beside himself with rage.

He made a desperate effort to get out of bed, but was so weak that it was too much, and he fell back again, half-unconscious.

Without heeding him in the least, the two men proceeded to search the person of the beautiful corpse, which was attired in a flowing wrapper, and were rewarded by finding a large roll of bills of large denomination, there probably being some ten or twelve thousand dollars, all told—a find that caused the robbers to utter a simultaneous cry of exultation.

Their cries once more aroused Deadwood Dick, and approaching him, they flourished the money in his face.

"Oh! So you thought to baffle us, did you?" Old Mark chuckled. "Ye thought we wouldn't find the money, but yer see we did, and ye kin just bet we're goin' ter hang onter it, too!"

"Oh, you wait!" returned Dick, his eyes flashing with a deadly light. "It is your turn to triumph now; it will be mine next. So, beware! Expect no quarter, no mercy from me, for you will not get it!"

"Bah! Dry up! What do we care for what you say?" snarled Smoky Sam. "Come, Mark, let's divide up the swag, and git thr'u' with this business."

Accordingly the men seated themselves, and counted the money out into two piles; then each took possession of his portion, and stowed it away in his pocket.

By this time it had grown quite dark, and the sound of rain-drops began to patter on the roof.

Turning the lamp low, Mark Warring went to the door and looked out.

A thick, fog-like mist had settled over the Pocket, which, together with the intense darkness, rendered it impossible for him to see the lights of the stampede camp.

"It's all right," Old Mark said. "We can finish the job now as well as at any time. Come, let's stow away the stiff in the boat first, an' then we'll look after the feller."

Accordingly, the lifeless remains of poor Nola Bristol were lifted between the two ruffians, and carried from the cabin to the edge of the rushing, roaring creek.

Here was a fair-sized skiff, beached upon the shore, and into this the body was placed.

The ruffians then returned to the cabin, and closed the door.

Smoky Sam then cut several pieces from his lariat, and with these the hands and feet of Deadwood Dick were securely bound.

Nerved to desperation, he endeavored to fight off his enemies, but it was useless. He was so weak that they easily overpowered him and rendered him helpless.

A handkerchief was then stuffed in his mouth to prevent any loud outcry.

"Thar, ye are ready fer shipment!" Old Mark chuckled. "When ye arrive at the next port, just let us know how ye are. Snatch him, Smoky!"

They lifted Dick from the bed, carried him

from the cabin, and placed him in the boat beside his dead wife, and by their united efforts, pushed the boat off into the rapid stream, and gazed after it with grim expressions, as it was borne swiftly away in the deep darkness.

"That settles that!" old Mark said, hoarsely. "That chap will never show up again around here, and I'll swear to it. This Pocket, and all ther gold what's in it, belongs to us. Now, for the bogus grave, and all is settled!"

"For the present, mebbe!" Smoky Sam said, grimly; "but, ef I ain't off my base, thar'll be more to ther matter o' this night's work!"

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### QUEEN CLARIBEL'S ENTERTAINMENT.

NEARLY two months have passed, and we once more look down into Deadwood Dick's Diggings—then a flower-bedecked mountain pocket, now a bustling young mining-camp, composed of two score or more of cabins and tented habitations.

Everywhere is bustle and activity.

Here men are busied in building, there are diggers at work, prospecting, or blasting into the mountain side; yonder comes a long wagon train, winding its way down the slope into the new El Dorado.

For gold has been found in paying quantities, and the inevitable rush has set in.

There are already several stores, saloons and gaming-rooms in flourishing operation, and a great barn-like hotel, the *Cinnamon Bear*, which is incapable of holding all the applicants for accommodations; preparations are being made for the erection of a stamp-mill, and everywhere is excitement, and everybody excited.

A stage line has already been started to the nearest town of any importance, and daily brings in crowds of people of various descriptions, while others come by horseback, wagon trains, and even on foot.

Already the camp has a large floating population, considering the yet brief period of its existence.

The cabin formerly occupied by Deadwood Dick, Junior, has been enlarged, and is known as the "Cocktail Casino," and has already achieved the greatest notoriety of any place in the camp, from the fact that three men had already died within its classic precincts "with their boots on."

It was a saloon and gambling den combined, and generally was regarded as a "hard hole," while its proprietor, Smoky Sam, was considered a thoroughbred tough.

The "Casino" was nightly the scene of some exciting event, and was most particularly patronized by the rougher element that swarmed to the camp, which still retained its name of "Deadwood Dick's Diggings."

Smoky Sam was making money rapidly, for, though a ruffian, he possessed considerable business tact, and once he secured custom was quick to throw out inducements to retain it.

A week before the events occurred, which we are about to relate, a German opened a saloon and dance-hall, across the way, known as the "Happy Hour," and, in doing so, detracted somewhat from Smoky's profits, by drawing away some of his customers.

This angered Smoky exceedingly, and he "cussed" the "sauerkraut" Dutchman in round terms; but, finding this availed nothing, he cast about for some means by which to win back the customers he had lost.

As a result, he one day hung upon the outer wall of the "Cocktail Casino," a banner containing the picture of a pretty girl, and the following announcement:

"TO-NIGHT! TO-NIGHT!

The Charming and Only

QUEEN CLARIBEL!

Champion Lady Magician,

Will appear here, to-night, in her wonderful entertainment of magical tricks and illusions.

Admission Free!"

That virtually settled it.

Anything that was free, in Deadwood Dick's Diggings, "hit the people in the right spot."

All day long the banner was an object of scrutiny by the crowds that passed, or entered the rummery, and it was voted that "if Queen Claribel was as pretty as her picture she was a daisy."

Long before dusk, a crowd began to congregate at the Casino.

With the enlargement that had been made, the former one room of the cabin had now been transformed into a very large, long apartment, with a bar near the front entrance.

In the rear a small curtained platform had been constructed, for the use of the lady magician, and this caught the eye of everybody. A *bona fide* entertainment had, of course, not yet struck the Diggings, and every one was on the *qui vive* to see the pretty illusionist.

She arrived on the evening stage, and a crowd was gathered at the Cinnamon Bear Hotel to get a glimpse of her.

But, they were in some respects disappointed. They saw a *petite*, dark-clad figure, whose face was heavily veiled, and that was all.

It had been announced that Queen Claribel would appear at nine o'clock, and by that time, the Casino was packed so full of people that there was hardly breathing room.

Smoky Sam, who was to act as master of ceremonies, occupied a position at the front of the stage, and in honor of the occasion, had had his hair and beard trimmed, and wore a span new suit of store clothes.

Since Smoky had started the Casino, he had improved his personal appearance, and now wore a "billed shirt," a watch and chain, and a large pin, which he averred was a solitaire but which of course, was paste.

Next to Smoky Sam, stood a man who had also arrived in the Diggings, by that night's stage, and who, but for the attention centered upon the stage, would have commanded more than ordinary notice.

Although not particularly a large person, he was of straight and erect figure, and evidently possessed of fair muscular strength. He wore a handsomely kept brown beard and mustache, had keen dark brown eyes and hair, and, altogether, was a man of imposing and handsome appearance.

His attire was scrupulously neat and well-fitting, consisting of a black cloth suit, patent-leather shoes, white shirt, stand-up collar and tie, and the glossiest of silk hats, which became him, immensely.

His hands were incased in lavender kids, and he sported an ebony cane with a massive gold head.

A diamond stud, large and of great brilliancy, also glittered upon his immaculate shirt-front.

Just such another high-toned, imposing appearing gent, was not to be found in all that particular portion of Arizona.

Owing to the eagerness of the audience, however, to see Queen Claribel, little attention was paid to the stranger.

At last, the hour of nine arrived; there was the tinkle of a little bell, and the curtain went up.

Upon the stage were two chairs, the inevitable magician's table, and some other apparatus used in performing tricks.

There was also a lamp, a small anvil, and an old flower-pot.

Directly after the curtain went up Queen Claribel made her appearance.

Instantly there was a tumult of applause which made the building tremble. The girl magician acknowledged this reception with a bow and a winning smile that immediately captivated her audience.

When the people, on seeing Queen Claribel's picture, had voted her "a daisy," they had not come far from the mark, for she certainly was a charming little beauty, with a pretty figure, of graceful carriage, and a pretty face, lit up with smiles, and a pair of dancing brown eyes—hair soft, sunny, and becomingly arranged.

She was attired in a rich costume of silk, satin and lace, and upon her tiny feet wore a pair of gold-bronze opera slippers.

The sleeves of her dress were cut in the flowing style, and exposed to view a pair of prettily rounded arms, of alabaster whiteness.

She wore diamonds at her throat, in her hair, and circlets studded with the same rare gems gleamed upon her fingers.

Not over seventeen or eighteen years of age, at the most, she was a young lady whose charming presence was sure to win the admiration of young and old alike.

After the tumult of applause had in a measure subsided, she advanced to the front of the stage, and said:

"Ladies and gentlemen!"—for there were a number of the female sex among the audience—"it gives me pleasure to appear before you, to-night, and if you will kindly lend me your attention, I will endeavor to exhibit a number of my tricks and illusions, in modern magic. As is usual, in my performances, I will begin the entertainment with the well-worn but always



amusing hat trick, producing from a gentleman's stiff hat various articles that the owner carries around with him day by day! Will any one in the audience lend me his silk tile for a few minutes?"

This caused a titter, for it was a fact that only three "plug" hats were in the camp.

One belonged to the nabob stranger; the second, an out-of-style affair, worn by Smoky Sam, had been purchased of a Jew merchant who had recently set up business in the camp, and the third belonged to the Reverend Obadiah Long, who had but recently struck the camp for the purpose of saving sinners.

In answer to the solicitation of pretty Queen Claribel, neither of the three gentlemen referred to offered the loan of their head-coverings.

"Come, gentlemen, don't be backward," the Queen said, smilingly. "I will guarantee to return your hats in as good condition as when I borrowed them, after I have performed the trick. Please look into your hat before I borrow it, and make sure there's nothing in it, and then I will convince you that you can't see straight, and are a traveling merchant in disguise. Will you kindly lend me your hat, sir?" and the Queen smiled sweetly upon the stranger in broadcloth.

"I beg to be excused!" the unknown answered. "I prefer to keep my hat out of the show business!"

"Indeed! You are quite particular!" the Queen retorted, a trifle sarcastically. "Perhaps, sir, your hat contains something you would not like brought to light? I've known of instances of men carrying bricks around in their hats!"

The crowd yelled at this, while Broadcloth, instead of getting mad, laughed good-naturedly.

Queen Claribel then turned to the Rev. Obadiah, a lank, lean, thin-faced man, with faded eyes, and a melancholy and decidedly hungry expression, and whose attenuated figure was clad in a suit of broadcloth which had seen many years of service and looked "sick," compared by that worn by the dashing stranger.

"Sir, will you kindly loan me *your* hat?" the pretty magician asked of the reverend, with one of her most entrancing smiles.

"No, *ma'am*!" was the prompt and emphatic reply. "No hat of mine shall be made to serve the black arts of the devil. I am a servant of the Lord!"

The crowd hooted at this, and some shied a juicy quid at Obadiah's hat, but it was poorly aimed, and hit the "servant" plum on the end of the nose.

It was some minutes ere quiet could be restored, and then Smoky Sam stepped forward.

"If my plug will answer, miss, ye'r welcome to it!" he said.

"Thank you," the Queen replied. "Yours will do quite as well as any. Look in the hat, first, and make sure it is empty."

"On course it's empty!" Smoky asseverated, first looking into the hat, and then ramming his hand down into it. "All ther stuff ye take out o' *that* hat won't be much, unless you hev got it hid up yer sleeve!"

"To convince you that I have not, I will shove up my sleeves," Claribel replied, suiting the action to the word, and shoving her sleeves up to the elbows, thereby exposing her exceedingly pretty pair of arms.

"Now, watch me closely, gentlemen, and see that I do not deceive you."

She gazed down into the hat a moment, and then, an exclamation of "ah!" escaped her lips, and reaching down into the hat, she drew forth several yards of ribbon, followed by a handkerchief, and then a tiny suit or baby's under clothing.

"Must be you are going to housekeeping," she observed, giving the dumfounded saloon-keeper a quizzical look, at which the crowd roared. "Let me see what else you're carrying around in your head-house. Ah! here's worse, and more of it!"

She next drew forth a pair of women's stockings, and then a china doll baby, black as the ace of spades.

"Well! well! well!" quoth the princess of magic. "Fie! for shame! To think *you* should carry around such things, in your head-gear Mr. Sam!"

The audience was fairly shrieking with laughter by this time, while Smoky Sam's astonishment was turning to mortification and rage.

"Give me back that hat!" he cried. "I'll stand no more of that monkey bizness. Gimme my hat, I say!"

"One moment!" the Queen placidly replied. "See, I have found a picture of the pickaninny's mother!"

With this, she held up in plain view, a cabinet photograph of a tremendously fat negress, whose

mouth was stretched from ear to ear, in a ludicrous grin.

This was too much for Smoky!

A torrent of oaths burst from his lips, and he strode forward to leap upon the stage, when, with a merry laugh, the Queen tossed him his hat.

Such a pandemonium of hoots and yells, and clapping of hands and stamping of feet, was never before or afterward heard in the Cocktail Casino.

It was several moments ere order could be restored, then some festive galoot, who was chock full of fun, snatched the hat from the bald head of the Reverend Obadiah Long, and tossed it on the stage.

"Dissect that crow-cage!" he yelled.

Claribel immediately improved the opportunity to have some fun at the itinerant's expense.

She seized the hat and gazed into it intently.

"Ah!" she said. "What do I see? Even the clergy have their faults. See here!" and she drew forth a full pack of playing-cards, and sent them scattering over the heads of the audience, much to Obadiah's unspeakable consternation.

Next she produced three hen's eggs, and passed them to the audience, that they might see that they were genuine fruit. One of these fell into the hands of a playfully-disposed bullwhacker, and the next instant the egg had spent its force against Obadiah's cheek. And the crowd howled again.

From the productive hat the Queen of Magic next drew forth a ruffled nightcap, and then tossed the hat to its owner.

"That's all of *that*!" she said.

"No! no!" cried Smoky Sam. "Look in this chap's hat." And seizing the nabob's hat he hurled it on the stage.

The next instant the gloved right hand of the stranger had seized him by the throat, and pinioned him back against the wall of the Cocktail Casino!

## CHAPTER V.

### DOCTOR DEATH-GRIP.

IN an instant all was excitement.

The laughter ceased, and all eyes were turned upon the handsome stranger, who, clutching Smoky Sam by the throat, pinioned him to the wall.

The action had been so sudden that few fully realized what had happened.

Suddenly grown deathly white, Queen Claribel stood upon the stage, in an attitude of terror.

The clutch of the unknown, as at arm's length he held the saloon-keeper against the wall, was not a light one, for it shut off Smoky Sam's breath, and caused his eyes to bulge from their sockets.

Holding his man firmly, the stranger turned, coolly facing the astonished spectators, at the same time with his disengaged hand drawing a self-cocking six shooter from an inner pocket of his Prince Albert coat.

"Gentlemen," he said, paying no attention to the frantic efforts of Smoky to tear away his grasp, "have the kindness to listen to me. I am Doctor Death-Grip. I have been injured by this man and others. I am an avenger! Wherever this mark appears upon the throat of a man, consider that at some time in the past I have been wronged by him, and that his days in this land are numbered!"

He immediately removed his hand from the saloon-keeper's throat, and faint from the loss of breath, Smoky Sam fell to the floor, face upward, his burly neck fully exposed to view.

The curious peered forward, and the stranger, pointing to the stangled man, said quietly:

"Behold!"

They did behold, and what they saw caused a murmur of astonishment to escape the lips of those who could gain a view.

Marked upon the throat of the saloon-keeper, in glaring crimson, and as plain as though printed there by type, was the word—

"DOOMED!"

While the crowd were staring in open-mouthed amazement at the sight, Doctor Death-grip, revolver in hand, spoke again:

"Stand aside, gentlemen. I am going to the hotel, and I propose to anchor here for awhile. If any man in the camp desires my enmity, let him call around between meal hours and notify me. I can accommodate one or all. As for that wolf," pointing to Smoky Sam, "if he sees fit to return me my hat in person it may serve to lengthen his earthly existence somewhat. If not, he had best bespeak the services of an un-

dertaker," and waving his revolver, the singular individual moved toward the door.

Involuntarily the crowd fell back, forming a lane through which Doctor Death-Grip passed, looking neither right nor left—cool, fearless and hatless!

His shiny tile still lay upon the stage, where it had been hurled by the venturesome proprietor of the Cocktail Casino.

Only long enough at the bar did the daring Doctor pause to light a cigar; then, with a pleasant "Good-night, gentlemen," he quitted the saloon.

Not an effort was made to prevent his departure. The crowd simply stared each other in the face. Such a singular, such a mysterious occurrence it was, that no one seemed to know exactly what to make of it.

After Doctor Death-Grip's departure, however, the Casino *habitués* entered into a buzz of conversation, and the opinions exchanged would fill a chapter.

Smoky Sam soon recovered his senses, and as soon as he did so, his first words were:

"Where is he?"

When informed, he made no remark, but went to the bar, and chancing to glance in a mirror, discovered the singular mark upon his throat. He turned excitedly to the crowd, and demanded to know what it meant.

When informed, and of the words of Doctor Death-Grip, all the color left his ruby face, and he staggered away to a chair, and sat down.

With his chin resting on the palms of his hands, and his elbows upon his knees, with his eyes fixed upon the floor, he sat there as motionless as a statue, noticing no one, speaking to no one.

Queen Claribel gave no more acts of magic, but dropped the curtain, and the show was over.

In the rear of the stage was a vacant space, where was a large trunk. Into this she packed her paraphernalia, and locked the receptacle securely; then, putting on a pair of rubbers, and her hat, and throwing a cloak about her, she left the Casino by a rear door.

The way to the Cinnamon Bear Hotel lay across a considerable vacant space—for there were no streets in Deadwood Dick's Diggings as yet, and the habitations were confusedly scattered without regard to regularity; but the moon was at its full and lit up the Pocket brilliantly, so she had no fears.

A single isolated cabin intervened between her and the Cinnamon Bear, but it was dark, and she paid no attention to it.

In leaving the Casino, she had brought Doctor Death-Grip's hat with her. Just why she could hardly have answered, beyond the fact that she had seen the mysterious Doctor in the hotel, and supposed, by leaving it at the office, he would receive it.

Her mind busied in thought, she looked neither right nor left, as she tripped along.

Just as she was passing the isolated cabin, however, a man stepped forth from its shadow, and confronted her, the moonlight shining full in his face, as he did so.

This man was Calvin Clinton, Myra Warring's lover.

At sight of him, Queen Claribel shrunk back, with a low cry of surprise.

"You!" she uttered.

"Me?" he replied, coolly. "You seem surprised."

"So I am. I expected never—ay, hoped never to look upon your face again."

"Oh! I presume so. Quite a masquerade you're doing these days—performing magic in a low whisky shop!"

"Which is none of your business."

"Oh! I don't know about that. I don't think I've lost all hope yet—at least, not all power."

Queen Claribel's eyes flashed like diamonds.

"Have a care how you speak to me, sir! I am my own master, now, independent and honorably earning my own living. I do not know you. Stand aside, sir, I am going to the hotel."

"Not just yet, dear. Let's make up."

"Never!"

"Claribel!"

"NEVER!"

"Oh! well, as you like. You know what's against you, Queen Claribel."

"I care not. Stand aside!"

"Wait! The colonel will here to-morrow."

"Let him come. I defy him, and you, too."

"You are foolish. Claribel—Queen Claribel, I want those papers!"

"You cannot have them. Stand aside, I say again!"

"Oh, no! Will you give me the papers?"

"No! never!"

JNA



"Then, by Heaven! I'll take them by force!" He sprang forward to seize her, but ere he could do so, a hand grasped him by the throat—a gloved hand, at that, but yet whose gripe seemed most terrible!

#### CHAPTER VI. IN THE MOONLIGHT.

It was Doctor Death-Grip, who had appeared so suddenly, and seized Cal Clinton by the throat with a gripe that was relentless as steel—so merciless, indeed, that Clinton gasped for breath, and his eyes seemed bursting from their sockets. Seeing this, Queen Claribel stepped quickly forward, and caught Doctor Death-Grip by the arm.

"Oh, do not kill him, sir!" she pleaded. "I want no harm to come to him on my account. Let him go."

Death-Grip immediately released his clutch upon Clinton's throat.

"As you say, lady!" he observed, turning to the Queen; "but I opine it would be better for you if you would let me shut off his wind entirely."

"No, no! Although he is my deadly enemy, I do not wish to see him harmed."

"You know him, then?"

"I once did, but do not any longer, having cut him off my list of acquaintances or friends. Here is your hat, sir, which I brought from the Casino."

"Thank you!" and the Doctor received his tile, and placed it upon his head.

By this time Cal Clinton had recovered his breath, and stood glaring at the couple savagely.

He seemed to be trying to find words to express his consuming rage, but failed utterly.

"Curse you! I'll have your life for this insult!" he cried, hoarsely, at the same time shaking his fist at Death-Grip. "You'll find your impudence won't be tolerated in this camp, you ruffian! I've a mind to put a bullet through you, as it is!"

"I'd try it, if I were you!" the Doctor retorted, coolly. "Bah! You haven't got the pluck to kill a rat! And, look ye, my festive galoot, if you ever offer to molest this lady again, I'll take you in hand and give you a thrashing you'll not forget to the longest day of your life. Now, you dust!"

"I won't go till I get what belongs to me!" Clinton declared, doggedly. "That girl is a thief, and has stolen papers in her possession that concern me, and I want them!"

"A thief, eh?" and the Doctor took a couple of quick strides toward the man, his eyes flashing dangerously.

Clinton did not wait for the man of broadcloth to approach any closer, but turned quickly, and strode away, muttering imprecations as he went.

"That chap is bad medicine!" the Doctor said, as he turned to Claribel.

"No need to tell me that," she replied. "I know by bitter experience what sort of a wretch he is. But you will excuse me for not thanking you before for your kindly interference. I must be going now."

"Will you not accept my escort as far as the hotel piazza?"

"Thank you, but it is best we should not be seen together. It might create a talk, you know."

"Perhaps you are right. Will you remain here for any length of time?"

"I have a week's engagement at the Casino."

"Then we may meet again."

"Possibly. Good-night!"

"Good-night!"

The Queen of Magic tripped away toward the Cinnamon Bear, and a few minutes later Death-Grip followed.

The news of the singular racket at the Cocktail Casino had already spread throughout the camp, and when the Doctor entered the hotel office, which was crowded with people, he instantly became the center of attraction; but he paid little attention to the crowd, or the fact that every one was gazing at him inquiringly.

Entering the bar-room, which was also well filled, he ordered the bartender to mix him a "night-cap."

While waiting for it, he was approached by two of the most pronounced bummers it had ever been his fortune to set eyes upon. Both were rum-faced wretches, short of stature, fat and slouchy of appearance, while their attire was ragged, ill-fitting and filthy.

It was hard to say which was the worse looking, for both were the personification of disgusting vagabonds.

They had been in the Diggings a week, and

during that time had managed to ring in their grub and drinks without expending a cent. Indeed, it was doubtful if either possessed such a thing as a stray copper—this pair of "beats" who traveled about as partners.

As they approached Doctor Death-Grip, the portlier bummer touched the man of broadcloth on the shoulder.

"You'll excuse me, sir," the loafer said, as the Doctor looked around, "but your handle is Death-Grip, is it not?"

"Well, what if it is?" the Doctor demanded, surveying the pair with a frown.

"Considerable, my dear sir," Bummer No. 1 answered, rubbing his hands patronizingly. "If you will allow me, I will introduce myself. I am the sheriff of this district, by name Horatio Hornblower. This gentleman here is my deputy, Ben Bungstarter, and we both represent the law."

"Well, what do I care who you are?" growled the disgusted Doctor. "Judging by your looks, I should decide that you represented a gin-foundry. Be off with you, and don't bother me!"

"But, my dear Mr. Death-Grip, you don't understand. As officers of the law, we have received instructions to arrest you and cast you into durance vile."

"You arrest me—you two dirty bloats?" and the Doctor gazed at the bummers in amused contempt. "Well, I admire cheek, but you've got an over-supply, it strikes me!"

"Nevertheless, we've orders to arrest you," Hornblower persisted. "Of course it's an unpleasant thing to do, but duty is duty."

"What is the charge against me?" the Doctor demanded, a twinkle of mischief in his keen brown eyes.

"You are charged with attempting the life of one of our law-abiding citizens, Smoky Sam, by choking him, sir!" Hornblower announced pompously.

The Doctor laughed. "So I did; and if you two disgusting specimens of humanity don't clear out and mind your own business, I'll choke you, too!"

Horatio Hornblower and Ben Bungstarter exchanged glances.

Had they after all tackled the wrong man?

"Now, see here, my dear Death-Grip, you must not feel sore toward us because we are officers of the law, and we allus try to do right," asseverated Hornblower. "We allus try to be as lenient as possible, don't we Benny?"

"Indade we do," assented Bungstarter, who evidently had the blood of Erin in his veins.

"Of course we do, every time," went on Horatio. "And now, my dear Mr. Death-Grip, we have no personal spite against you, and no doubt we can mutually arrange so there will be no trouble. If you see fit to slip us a fiver apiece, we'll let the matter drop, and Smoky Sam can prosecute his own case."

"Nary a fiver!" Doc replied, leisurely sipping his night-cap.

"Two-and-a-half, then?"

"Nary two-and-a-half."

"One dollar!"

"Not one cent!"

Hornblower looked disgusted, and once more exchanged glances with his pard.

"Well, that's tough!" Hornblower asserted. "When we offer to do the right thing by you, you won't accept. Will you put out the drinks, providing we let up on ye an' don't execute the mandate of the law of this great and glorious Territory?"

"No!" replied Death-Grip, placing his glass upon the bar, "but I'll do still better than that. Instead of putting out the drinks, as you term it, I'll put you out!" and suiting action to the word, he seized the bummers by the nape of the neck and the seat of the trousers, and run him out of the room in a jiffy, giving him a boost off the hotel piazza that landed the unfortunate Hornblower headforemost into a mud-puddle.

Turning quickly, Death-Grip re-entered the bar-room to serve Benny Bungstarter in a similar manner; but, after witnessing the unfortunate accident to his comrade, Ben had clambered out of a window in ridiculous haste; seeing which, the Doctor betook himself to bed, leaving behind the impression that he was, as one bystander observed, "a cuss on wheels."

#### CHAPTER VII. "PROPHETIC WORDS!"

Since Deadwood Dick's Diggings had sprung into reality as a mining-camp, a change had come over at least one of our characters, and that particular one was Mark Warring.

Formerly we knew him as a rough, ill-natured and by no means scrupulous miner, who had

had his life, in a measure, soured by a most unsuccessful struggle with the world; but now we find him a well-dressed, smoothly-shaven business man, and regarded as the wealthiest citizen in the Diggings.

When the miners began to make the first overtures toward establishing a settlement in the Pocket, the question of allotting claims came in for consideration. Most of the miners had no means at all, and even after the claims were defined, they were too poor to work them. They had no means of subsistence, except what game they could capture, and the struggle of providing habitations was a tough one.

Of the twelve thousand dollars Old Mark and Smoky Sam had taken from Deadwood Dick's cabin, each had appropriated half. Smoky Sam had a passion for gambling, and one night he and Mark got together and played poker. The result was that Mark captured all of Smoky's cash, except a couple of hundred dollars.

By this time the stampedeers had got their habitations up, and had gone to housekeeping, but were on the point of starvation.

Within a day's drive of the Diggings was a trading-post, where provender and like necessities could be got for cash; but where was the cash to come from? No gold had yet been mined, and game was becoming very scarce, so the situation really was desperate.

At this point Mark Warring came to the fore, in conjunction with Calvin Clinton, and the two showed the good Samaritan (?) of their natures.

They had built themselves a roomy cabin, and over the door hung a sign:

"WARRING AND CLINTON,  
REAL ESTATE AGENTS.  
Money Loaned."

Inquiry elicited the announcement that they were quite ready to loan money, or to purchase claims for cash.

Their terms were simple but emphatic: If any of the distressed claim-holders wanted to sell outright, the agents would pay them a nominal sum for their claims, rent them the cabins, and allow them to work the claims on percentage.

In this way the better portion of the Pocket was secured by the two real estate men.

Several of the stampedeers sold out wholly, and left for other diggings.

When the rush set in, after the Diggings was "boomed" as a new and rich placer, real estate went up tremendously, and the two operators literally coined money.

Claims were divided and subdivided, and rented or sold at enormous figures. If rented, it was on terms by which W. & C. could not help but profit.

If a man came along and wanted to buy a claim and had no money, he was of no use. He must have a part cash, at least, and be willing to submit to mortgage and percentage of realized profits; or if a new-comer wanted to start in some business, he was helped with the agreement that half the profits were to go to the two capitalists.

The Cinnamon Bear Hotel was put up for a Down-East Yankee, and half the profits went to Warring and Clinton. The Cocktail Casino was started in a like manner, and so were several other enterprises, and in fact, the two real estate men soon controlled nearly every money-making source in the Pocket.

Cal Clinton had a secret, and at times he was grim, sullen and uncommunicative. He had money, having held his own in investment, with his partner. But money did not seem to ease his conscience. He was a firm believer in spiritualism, dreams, forewarnings, and the like, and this malady, if such it could be called, seemed to grow upon him.

One morning, pale as a ghost, he joined his partner at their office, and offered to sell out his interest for the sum of his original investment.

Mark Warring, the wily schemer, at once accepted, without asking any questions, and the matter was settled there and then, and Clinton received his money.

The next day he came back, and wanted to re-enter partnership at the same figure he sold out, but Old Mark refused to readmit him on any terms. He had secured the whole of the firm's interests, and intended to hold them.

This left Clinton virtually out of business and income, but he took the refusal good-naturedly, and if he cherished any ill-feelings toward Warring, he was careful not to betray them.

He continued to pay his respects to his affianced, pretty Myra, and to all appearances, did not take his foolish transaction seriously to heart.



## Deadwood Dick's Diggings.

It was thus that Old Mark had suddenly, as it were, become the richest man in Deadwood Dick's Diggings, and was daily adding to his wealth, for the revenues he derived from claims, rents and business enterprises were now something very handsome.

He had built and furnished a substantial little office, opposite the Cinnamon Bear Hotel, and here he transacted his business, and in a strong safe stored away his money.

It was mid-forenoon of the day following the events chronicled in our last chapter, and Warring was seated in an easy-chair in his office, leisurely smoking his cigar, while he idly watched the people who passed the open door.

Long Jim, of the Cinnamon Bear, had just been over and paid him a goodly sum of percentage money, and this fact placed the speculator in a pleasant frame of mind.

"It's an ill wind that blows no one good," he mused, "and it was a lucky day when I struck this locate—a lucky day, indeed! Then I was poorer than a circuit preacher, but now I'm getting rich, day by day. With ten thousand dollars in my safe, and ten times that value in property, I don't know why my future is not assured. I may yet be one of the men of might in the West."

"Ha! ha! the poor devil we sent down the stream, left me a rich legacy—a rich legacy!" he repeated delightedly, as if enjoying the contemplation of the fruits of his base act, on that terrible night. "Ha! ha!" and he laughed again; "no one even suspects the secret of that night except Smoky. The grave back of the cabin satisfied every one, and no one has ever believed otherwise than that the small-pox chap died and was buried, as we represented. As for Smoky, he is all right. He dare not give anything away. But the mystery of this Doctor Death-Grip, and the choking affair, I don't understand. Kinder strange Smoky don't show up!"

This last sentence was uttered in an audible voice, and was immediately answered by Smoky Sam, in person, who made his appearance in the doorway.

"Smoky is here. What d'ye want of him?"

"Simply a look at you," Old Mark replied. "I've heard this talk that's afloat, and I want to learn the truth of it!"

"It's true enough, so far as that is concerned, an' report hain't overrated it," Smoky replied, grimly. "Ye kin see fer yourself."

He removed a handkerchief from about his neck, and exposed his singularly marked neck to view.

"Doomed!"

It appeared there as plainly as when first it was stamped on his white flesh by that terrible Death-Grip.

Warring regarded it with astonishment. "Why don't you wash it off?" he demanded.

At which the proprietor of the Casino sneered.

"You're a fool!" he growled. "The cursed mark won't wash off. I've scrubbed, with strong soap, 'til I've nigh scrubbed the hide off, but et's no use. The more I scrub the plainer et gits!"

Old Mark began to look more serious, and fell back to his old vernacular.

"This feller grabbed ye by the throat an' choked ye?"

"Waal, I reckon he did!"

"He had a glove on his hand?"

"Yes, he jist had."

"And when he took his hand away—?"

"The mark war thar."

"He told the crowd you had injured him, an' you war doomed, an' you weren't the only one?"

"Yas, that's what the boyees say. I wasn't awake at the time, 'cause he hed nigh choked the life out o' me."

"Did ye ever see him before?"

"No, never!"

"Sure? Think, and perhaps you can remember him."

"No, sir; I've been sizin' him up, this half-hour, but don't know him—never did know him."

"He knows you?"

"Ruther seems so!"

And Smoky felt of his throat dubiously.

Then, he added:

"This cursed thing ain't a pleasant gift, but there's one satisfaction—I ain't ther only one as carries the mark!"

Old Mark started, nervously.

"Who else has got it?" he demanded.

"Cal Clinton! He's got a silk handkerchief 'round his gullet, an' sez he's got sore throat, but Long Jim says he carries the same mark I do!"

"The devil ye say! How'd he git it?"

"Go ask him. He won't knuckle in to anything of the kind, but everybody believes he carries the mark all the same."

The speculator's brows knitted in a scowl.

"This thing must be looked into!" he declared, savagely. "We ain't goin' ter hev no such a chap around this camp, not ef I know myself. Why don't ther gang go fer him, an' clean him out?"

"Every one's afeard of him!"

"You, too, I suppose?" with a sneer of disgust.

"Well, I've had plenty, for the present," Smoky honestly acknowledged.

"You're a coward!"

"If you're any braver, go tackle him, yourself. If you don't git a red throat, I'm a liar!"

"What sort of a lookin' chap is he?"

"Just step to ther door, and gaze across onter the piazzer of the Cinnamon Bar if you wants ter know."

With considerable curiosity, Mark arose, and went to the door.

The hotel piazza was just opposite his office. Several men were lounging there, some smoking, some chatting, and among them Doctor Death-Grip, who was engaged in perusing what was evidently a pamphlet novel.

Warring, scanning the loungers keenly, turned to Smoky Sam.

"D'ye mean the fellow with the high hat?" he queried.

"Yas. Did ye ever see him before?"

Mark took another survey, then returned to his seat.

"No, I don't think I ever did," he answered, thoughtfully, "unless he is disguised. He looks like a nabob, but I've noticed one thing!"

"What?"

"He wears gloves on his hands, even when thar's no need of it."

"Yas, I noticed that. Kinder curious, eh?"

"Decidedly so. What I'd like to know, is, how, with a gloved hand, he could make that indelible mark on your neck!"

"That's what sticks me."

"Which hand did he grab you with?"

Smoky thought a moment.

"If I remember kerect, et was the right," he said. "He snatched me so suddint, an' begun to shet off my wind, that I can't swear which hand he used. S'posin' you go over and ask him to let you examine his dukes!"

The leading citizen shook his head.

"You are kind," he admitted, "but I'll let out that job to some one else. I hear he bounced Hornblower out of the hotel, last night?"

"Yes, he did, an' he'd 'a' throw'd Bungstarter out next, ef Bung hadn't tuk to the window. But them two bums ain't no good. They orter be fired."

"Not so fast. They may work in to advantage yet!"

"How?"

"That cuss has got ter be got rid of. He is dangerous to have around—especially to you and me!"

Smoky Sam started. "What d'ye mean?" he demanded.

"I'm beginning to feel uneasy!" Mark declared. "Do you remember a night, now not two months ago?"

Smoky Sam nodded, and a strange expression swept over his rugged features.

"Yas! an' I ain't likely to fergit et soon, neither," he replied. "I've not had a straight night's sleep since that devil's own job."

Mark laughed as if in ridicule, but the laugh was a dismal failure, for it fairly stuck in his throat.

"Pshaw!" he said. "Don't get weak-kneed. I'll admit I have regretted the act. But what's the odds. Let bygones be bygones."

"But you've got a spicion?"

"Yes. I don't believe this Death-Grip is the man we sent afloat, for the two no more look alike than er pe an' a pumpkin. But that don't signify everything. This Deadwood Dick we sent off, hadn't no more show o' livin' out that storm, in the condition he war, than a cat under water wi' a bowlder tied to et's neck. But, somehow, he may have got ashore, met some chap, and sent him on to fix us. In sech a case, et looks like this 'ere Death-Grip, as he calls himself, is the man sent!"

Smoky nodded again.

"Et looks so," he confessed. "I tell ye, boss, ye may laugh at my weak-knees, as ye call et, but I tell ye, I've been expectin' suthin' like this ever since that night. That poor sufferin' cuss has come before my mind's eye, more'n a thousand times since then, an' tho' I'll allow I hain't been no shakes of a squar' man for many year,

I've allus regretted that act. Et warn't no baby of a chap we were foolin' with then, an' I do b'lieve ef he could hev hed the stuff left to keep him on his feet, he'd 'a' given us a tussle we'd found enough of. No, boss! The work o' that night will never do either of us any good. You're rich, et's true, an' I'm scoopin' in a few myself. But fer what? I ain't tough as I am, devoid of all human principle, and as sure as I believe there is a God, I believe the oath of Deadwood Dick will be kept!"

"PROPHETIC WORDS!"

The words fell upon the ears of the two men, and caused them to leap to their feet, each with a face grown ashy white.

### CHAPTER VIII.

#### THE CONSPIRATORS.

ABOUT the same time of the interview between Smoky Sam and Old Mark, Calvin Clinton sat in one of the rooms of the Cinnamon Bear. In front of him was a table, and on the opposite side of the table sat the Reverend Obadiah Long.

Clinton was paler than usual, and, although neatly attired, a handkerchief tied about his neck, gave him rather an unfinished appearance.

"Well, you met the girl?" Obadiah observed, "and were frustrated?"

"Curses, yes! And, not only that, but marked for life!"

"Pshaw! What nonsense!"

"Nothing of the sort. The chap that runs the Casino has tried all plans to obliterate the word, and failed, and I have done the same. Ink, or whatever the stuff is, it won't wash out. It may wear out, but there is no telling how long it will take!"

"Who is this fellow, anyhow? He must be possessed of the devil."

"I'll take the devil out of him before he is many days older!" Clinton gritted.

"Do you think he ever met Claribel before last night, Calvin?"

"No. I am sure he did not."

"And you never saw him before yesterday?"

"Never! I could swear to it!"

"Strange! strange!" the old man said. "I don't like the way matters lay. As well as we have laid our plans, I fear we shall yet lose!"

"Never!" Clinton asseverated, fiercely.

"Where is Claribel?"

"In her room, I presume."

The Reverend Obadiah meditated.

"The colonel will arrive to-night!" he finally said, reflectively. "Calvin, we must work! There are no two ways about it—we must work. There is much to be done in a few hours! What time does the stage arrive to-night?"

"That is uncertain. It is due at seven, in the evening. Sometimes it arrives earlier; but it is just as liable not to reach here before midnight, especially if there's a big load, as there is apt to be."

"So much the better. Now, listen to me. Let me manage, and I'll work it through all O. K. You think the colonel suspects that Claribel is here, eh?"

"Haven't a doubt of it. Else why should he come here? He's not seeking for investments and business."

"Very true. But he may have found out that So-and-So is here!"

"Pshaw! no. I covered up the trail, so to speak, when we left Tribale. Warring and Myra are as dead as if the two were buried."

"But if the colonel and Mark should meet?"

"Then there would be blood on the face of the moon," Clinton declared, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"And we would be the losers?"

"It wouldn't benefit us any, I fancy."

"Well, then this is what is to be done. Listen, attentively, and do as I bid, and all will be well. You and Myra must be wed, before to-morrow midnight. I will leave it to your own ingenuity to arrange it. This man, Death-Grip, as he styles himself, must be got rid of, at once, and the papers must be got away from Claribel. All this, except clause first, must transpire before the arrival of the colonel. Understand?"

"Yes. I've a notion this Death-Grip must be gotten rid of first!"

"You are right. The sooner, the better!"

"I think it can be fixed. Smoky Sam owes the fellow no good will; I don't, that is certain; and the two bummers, Hornblower and Bungstarter, have also got it in for him. As the general thing, the crowd have a fear of him, but if they had a leader, they'd go for him in a jiffy, you bet! After he's done up, we can work the rest easier."

"Well, go ahead, and when I get a chance to show my hand, I'll be there!"



The two arose and left the room.

The room in question had a window looking out on the piazza. The sash and curtain were both down, and the two conspirators, sitting close to the window on the inside, had no suspicion that, tipped back in his chair against the window-sill, on the outside, was the very man, of all men in Deadwood Dick's Diggings, they had most to fear—Doctor Death-Grip.

Apparently deeply engrossed in reading, his sense of hearing was on the alert, and he had overheard every word that had passed between the two plotters.

"Aha!" he mused, when he heard the two leave the room. "So *this* is a game, eh? It seems that Cal Clinton and Obadiah Long have met before, and there's a conspiracy afoot, to cheat or beat somebody or something. Let me see: I'm in the way, am I? and steps will be taken to put me in a state of everlasting repose, eh? I shall have to take a hand in this little game myself," and rising, he left the piazza, and sauntered away toward the cabin home of Myra Warring.

As he approached the cabin, Myra came out, attired for a walk, and looking as pretty as ever.

She would have passed the gentleman of broadcloth with merely a glance, only that he paused, and raised his hat, politely.

"I beg you will excuse me!" he said, "but are you not Miss Myra Warring?"

"I am, sir," Myra replied, not a little surprised.

"Ah! I thought I was not mistaken. Miss Warring, I am a total stranger to you, but I have just overheard an interview between two persons that gives me reason to believe you are to be made, directly, or indirectly, the victim of a conspiracy. Now, I am something of a detective, in my way, and my curiosity having been aroused, I would like to ferret the matter out, and if possible prevent a crime, for I have every reason to believe the two persons whose confab I overheard are a pair of villains. In fact, I know they are. Now, would it be asking too much of you to grant me an interview, which I am positive will be of interest to you?"

"I do not know you, sir. Who are you?"

"A comparative stranger in town, miss. Those who know me at all, know me as Doctor Death-Grip. The name, however, need not frighten you, nor prevent an interview."

Myra looked at the stranger scrutinizingly, but his appearance and demeanor were so gentlemanly that she was favorably impressed, so she answered:

"Very well. If what you have to say concerns me, I will listen to you," and she led the way toward the cabin.

When they were seated Doctor Death-Grip remarked:

"No doubt you are surprised at my presumption in accosting you, but I considered it in the line of duty. I will tell you beforehand, that I have no real idea of what this conspiracy is, but with what information I can pick up, I mean to find out. I wish to put a few questions to you, and without doubt you will consult your own interests by answering them. How long can you remember back into the past, Miss Warring?"

"Oh! back to the age of six, I think."

"Was your mother living, then?"

"No, sir. She died when I was a baby."

"Have you always known Mark Warring as a father?"

"Why, yes, sir!" and she looked her astonishment.

"Are you sure he is your father?" Death-Grip went on.

"I have never had any reason to suppose he was not, sir!"

"How long have you known Calvin Clinton?"

"Some three months. He came to Tribale, and I first made his acquaintance there."

"You are betrothed to him?"

"Yes, sir!" and Myra blushed.

"Is your wedding day named?"

"No, sir."

"If he were to ask you to wed him *at once*, would you do so?"

"Why—why, I don't know. What a strange question to ask a lady!"

"Nevertheless, it is important that you should give me an answer."

"Well, if he were to insist, I do not know but what I should acquiesce."

"Miss Warring, don't you do it, under any consideration! Calvin Clinton is not worthy of you. He is one of the conspirators of whom I spoke. The other is a man who calls himself Obadiah Long. The two have some secret reason for wishing this marriage to take place at once. If you were to consent, you would become a

party to the conspiracy, whatever it is. Calvin Clinton is a scheming villain, and is backed up by the old reprobate, Long!"

"Sir! I will not listen to such charges against Mr. Clinton. He has always proven himself a gentleman to me!"

"I haven't a doubt of that, dear lady; nevertheless, I am going to prove to you that he is a wolf in sheep's clothing. Have you heard of the girl magician, called Queen Claribel?"

Myra nodded, her lip curling with contempt.

"Yes, I've heard of her," she said. "Some wandering adventuress!"

"No, I think she is a respectable and nice young woman. However, if she is an adventuress, she *knows* your affianced—is, or has been, something to him. And she, too, is also mixed up in this conspiracy case."

"Pray explain your reason for supposing that this woman is, or ever has been anything to Mr. Clinton," Myra said, a trifle haughtily.

"Very well," Death-Grip replied, "I will do so."

He then related concerning the meeting in the moonlight; how, by chance, he had overheard the conversation between Clinton and Claribel, and now he had interposed, when the former had attempted to assault the girl magician.

Myra listened, attentively, her pretty face occasionally changing expression.

Death-Grip also narrated, nearly word for word, the conversation that had passed between Clinton and Obadiah Long.

"Now, are you convinced?" he demanded, when he had finished.

"Really, I don't know. Perhaps I should be, if I knew whether to believe you or not. Of course I have only your word for it."

"Well, I have told you the truth, for your own benefit. You can believe it or not, as you like. I've no more interest in the matter beyond a detective's curiosity, for no matter what comes of it, it will not make me any the richer, as you no doubt will acknowledge. These two interesting individuals have a desire to send me up Salt River, however, and I feel in duty bound to keep an eye on them. I must be going, now, and having warned you I consider that I have done my duty, and you will not come to any trouble, 'if you act wisely and warily'."

"Thank you, sir. I am sure I am ever so much obliged for what you have told me, and I feel inclined to believe you. At any rate I shall give the matter my earnest consideration."

"I hope you will. And, above all, should you have any conversation with Clinton, be kind enough to leave me out!"

"I will do so, sir. And if you learn anything else of interest to me I presume you will let me know."

"With pleasure, if you wish. I shall be on the alert, my dear lady, and if I am not considerably mistaken, I shall upturn a plot that will surprise you even more than the substance of this interview."

Doctor Death-Grip bade the fair Myra adieu, and took his departure.

"One stroke!" he muttered, with darkening brow, as he walked leisurely toward the office of Mark Warring. "What a fool I am to weaken! I should have shaken her by the hand in leaving, but—but, no! Too fair, too beautiful, too innocent is she, to become the victim of a promised vengeance! I will spare her—ay! protect her!"

And the man of broadcloth heaved a sigh as he strode onward.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE VOICE FROM THE DEAD.

PROBABLY there were never two more frightened men, in the history of Deadwood Dick's Diggings than were Mark Warring and Smoky Sam when through the broker's office rung the suggestive sentence—

### "PROPHETIC WORDS!"

Both sprung to their feet and gazed around them in astonishment, the face of each turning ashy white.

Whence had come the voice?

There was but one window and one door to the office, both of which were in front, and both were open, but no face was visible at either opening.

The two villains exchanged glances.

"I've heard!" Smoky gasped.

"Of course I did," replied Mark, trembling violently. "It was *his* voice!"

"Whose?"

"The feller we sent down-stream—Deadwood Dick!"

Smoky turned another shade whiter.

"I told ye we'd hear from him," he groaned. "It was a speerit voice from the other world!"

"Devils! nonsense!" replied Warring, trying to appear brave. "Come, quick! let's see who's been listening," and they rushed out of doors, and together, made a hasty circuit of the little building; but they saw no one within a hundred yards of the place.

Over on the piazza of the Cinnamon Bear were still several loungers, but Doctor Death-Grip was not among them—a fact which the two alarmed villains both noted, and at which old Mark uttered an oath.

"'Twas that cuss, Death-Grip!" he gritted.

"See, he's not on the piazza."

"I notis," Smoky responded. "But whar is he? Thar's no one near this shebang."

"True enough. But a sport who can put an indelible mark on a man's gullet without any tools except a gloved hand, is possessed of the devil and can do anything. Come inside, Smoky. Something has got to be *did*!"

"Waal, yes, I should presume to allow ther' has," Smoky assented, as he followed the moneyed man of the Diggings into the office.

When the two were seated, Warring repeated his former declaration:

"Something's got to be *did*."

"Well, what?" demanded Smoky, dubiously.

"This accursed Death-Grip must be got rid of, and that, too, at once. Do you know what I believe?"

"No. What?"

"That he's the same chap we sent down the stream—Deadwood Dick."

"Git out! The two ain't no more alike than a cow and a chicken."

"That don't matter. Nowadays a man can disguise himself so his own mother wouldn't know him. If the man ain't Deadwood Dick I'll eat my head. If it is Dick he's here for a purpose, and that purpose concerns you and me most particularly."

"Well, maybe ye'r right. Kinder looks like it, the way he went fer my throttle," Smoky admitted, with a ghastly smile. "As ye say, the feller's got to be done up. But who's goin' to do it? I allow ther' ain't no single man in the camp as wants to take chances of tackling him."

"Pshaw! One shot from your revolver would do the job!"

"Maybe! But if I missed—what then? Why there'd be a dead Samuel in town in less than a holy second. No! no! I ain't on ther' funeral list to-day, by a long shot!"

"Well, then, if one is afraid to do the job, a dozen needn't be. Go get a dozen of the toughest men in camp, and appoint a meeting to-night, at eight, at the tall elm at the lower end of the Pocket. By that time I will have arranged some plan to entrap Mister Death-Grip and give him the death-grip."

"All right. I reckon et won't take me long to get gang enough together to lay him out!" Smoky said, grimly. "I know one thing: ye don't ketch me asleep, as long as the cussed galoot is alive and kickin'!"

He took his departure, and soon Cal Clinton entered the office without ceremony, his face dark with passion.

Evidently something had happened not pleasing to him, for he threw himself into a chair, and bit off the end of a cigar so viciously as to cause the broker to give him an inquiring glance.

"Well, Calvin, what's gone wrong now?" was the query.

"The devil's to pay!" was the savage reply.

"Not satisfied with getting all my interests in the Pocket away from me, you've been setting Myra up against me!"

"Nothing of the sort. What the blazes ever put that idea into your head?"

"Then, you deny that you have influenced her against me?"

"Certainly I do. Why, I've never opposed the match in the slightest. What's the difficulty?"

"Difficulty enough. You see I expect to have to take a business trip to Denver inside of a few days, and before going I wanted to have the knot tied that would make Myra my wife. So I went to her a bit ago, and proposed that we be married to-morrow."

"Well, what did she say?"

"What did she say? Why, she said 'no,' most emphatically. Not only that, but she said that she had wholly changed her mind, and could not marry me at all, and begged that I discontinue my visits. I demanded an explanation, but she refused to give one, and settled matters by ordering me to leave the house. Now I want to know what it all means?"



Old Mark scratched his head as if perplexed. "Dash me if I know. What have you been doing to rile the girl?" he demanded.

"Nothing! nothing whatever. We have been on the best of terms until my visit to-day, and I have been confident of her love for me; but now I see no other explanation than that some one has poisoned her mind against me!"

"Pshaw! who could do that? No one pays her attention except you. You haven't an enemy in all the camp unless it is—"

"Who?" Clinton demanded eagerly.

"The man who left the mark on your throat!" and the broker laughed heartily, while Clinton flushed to the temples.

"I have no mark on my neck. I've got a sore throat!" he stammered.

"Bah! don't fib, Calvin!" returned the other, "for it is of no use. You've got the same mark on your throat that Smoky Sam has—the word 'Doomed!'—and what's more, you cannot wash it off. Take off yer handkerchief and let's have a look at the thing!"

Thus cornered, Clinton reluctantly removed the bandage, and, sure enough, there, in plain sight upon his neck, was the crimson word, "Doomed!" almost in the same spot as on the throat of Smoky Sam.

"That beats anything I ever saw!" Warring declared very seriously. "How did it happen, Cal?"

"I was coming from the Casino across the vacant lot 'twixt here and there, when this infernal interloper, who calls himself Death-Grip—a proper name for him, it is, too—leaped upon me, and grabbed me by the throat. I thought he was going to kill me at first, but finally succeeded in breaking away from him, and made my escape. Mark, that fellow is a very emissary of the devil, I do believe!"

"I've a notion of the sort myself," Warring replied, with a grim shake of the head. "He is a dangerous character at the best, and it is not safe to have him running around loose. He's got to be squelched!"

"Just my idea. But how? He takes things so cool and easy, and apparently is so perfectly fearless, that nigh every one is afraid of him."

"So it seems. But wait. We'll fix him. There's to be a meeting at the tall elm to-night, and arrangements will then be made to dispose of him. Will you be there at eight o'clock?"

Clinton meditated a moment.

"I'll see," he said. "Most likely I'll be present. But, do you really think it's this Death-Grip's influence that has poisoned Myra's mind against me?"

"No doubt. No one else would or could do it!"

"I don't know. But there's only one of two things about the matter. To-morrow night I leave for Denver to claim a fortune that was left to me by an uncle a year ago. Myra must marry me between now and to-morrow night, or not at all, for if she refuses, I shall not return here!"

"Fortune, eh? Why, you never told me you had a fortune coming to you!"

"I wanted to win Myra as a poor man, and surprise her afterward."

"How much of a fortune is coming to you?"

"Something over two hundred thousand!"

An announcement that nearly took Mark Warring's breath away.

"You don't mean it," he ejaculated, incredulously.

"But I do, though," the other returned.

"Well, you're lucky. I'm sorry enough about this falling out betwixt you an' Myra; but, rest easy. I'll fix it all right. She knows better than to disobey me, and when I tell her to marry you, she'll do it."

"I doubt it!"

"Doubt nothing of the sort. If I don't fix it so she marries you, you shall have back your half-interest in my business at what you sold out for."

"It's a bargain," Clinton cried, springing to his feet. "Shake on that!"

"But hold on!" said Old Mark. "If I do influence her to marry you within the specified time, what am I to get?"

Clinton reflected a moment.

"I'll give you five thousand in cash, as soon as the ceremony is performed," he said, finally.

"It's a bargain. Shake on that."

And shake they did, and the compact was sealed, providing both should adhere to their promises—which was a matter of question.

Clinton took his departure, and the scheming old operator leaned back in his easy-chair, a peculiar gleam in his eyes.

"Two hundred thousand dollars," he muttered. "Ah! my boy, you are lyin' to me."

## CHAPTER X.

### THE BRAND OF VENGEANCE AGAIN.

DURING the forenoon it was generally dull at Warring's office, and equally that way until mid-afternoon; so, after dinner, he usually took an afternoon nap.

It chanced, however, that the scheming examiner did not go home to dinner to-day, but, about an hour before noon, feeling drowsy, he closed and locked the office door, and pulled down the curtain, as was his wont, and settling back in his chair, he went to sleep. How long he slept he could not realize, when he awakened with a violent start.

For a moment he glared around him. Beads of perspiration stood upon his forehead.

"What an infernal ugly dream," he gasped. "I thought the ghost of Deadwood Dick stood beside me, and that then he went to the safe and took all my money. Heavens, how dark it is!"

And so it was. Scarcely a ray of light penetrated the office, although outside it was, of course, broad daylight.

For several minutes the guilty man seemed afraid to move from his chair, but finally struck a match and lit a small hand-lamp that stood upon the table at his right hand.

Then he arose, and stared about the place, to make sure there were really no ghosts here in the room.

"It must have been a nightmare," he muttered. "Curse that Smoky Sam! Somehow, he's got my nerves unstrung with his superstitious fol-de-rol. Ha! what's this?"

His eyes fell upon a sealed envelope that lay upon the table. Right well he knew that no such envelope was on the table when he went to sleep.

For a moment, he seemed loth to touch the letter, then he seized the envelope and tore it open.

Inside was a slip of paper, on which was a single word, traced evidently by a finger, dipped in blood:

"Doomed!"

With an ejaculation of horror, Old Mark dropped the paper, as though it had been a scorpion.

"I was wrong!" he gasped. "It was not a dream. Some one has been here!"

He rushed to the door, and tried it, but it was locked.

The window, however, was up. He had neglected to shut it down, when he had pulled down the curtain.

Involuntarily, he glanced toward the safe, which stood in one corner of the office.

"I wonder if the money is all right?" he muttered. "There were twenty-thousand dollars in it before I fell asleep!"

Nervous, and filled with apprehension, he seized the lamp, approached the safe, threw open its door, and drew out the principal money drawer—the receptacle that, a few hours before, had contained \$20,000 in bank notes, mostly of large denomination.

The drawer was empty!

Not not entirely, for in the bottom lay an ordinary sheet of writing paper, containing the following message, written, with ink, in a graceful style of chirography:

"You have done well for the time you have been here. I could not have done better, myself. Part of this you know, you stole from me. The remainder I appropriate, as revenue for the use of my real estate.

"Yours Until (your) Death,  
"DEADWOOD DICK, JR."

As he read this daring and unbecoming note, he seemed dazed and frightened, then he grew wild with fury.

"Ten thousand demons!" he gasped. "I have been robbed—robbed of all my money, and that, too, by the very man I believed dead. Oh! God! this is the fruit of my accursed foolishness. Blind idiot I was ever to leave the money here!"

And burying his face in his hands, the defeated wretch shook with emotion.

"Don't take it so hard, old man!" said a half-mocking voice. "You'll soon pick up again. Really, if I know anything, you ought to consider yourself lucky that you're alive!"

Warring started up, and glared around him, an expression of utter horror depicted upon his pallid countenance, for he was utterly alone; not a soul was in the room besides himself!

He rushed to the window, tore aside the curtain, and thrust forth his head, into the open air, but saw no one within a dozen yards of the office.

A few people were lounging upon the Cinnamon Bear piazza, but that was all.

Doctor Death-Grip was not among the number.

Mechanically, Old Mark staggered to his chair, and sat down. He was now wild with despair, and tremulous with angry passion.

"Gone! all gone!" he mused, bitterly, "and I am now no richer than when I first came here, except for what I own, in the valley. True, my revenues thus derived, are large, but it will take—pshaw! I am a driveling idiot! What good will all the claims and other sources of income do me, if this Deadwood Dick is still alive, as there now seems to be no reason to doubt? Even as he stole away my money while I slept he'll do it again. Furies seize the fellow! Why did I not take Smoky's advice, and end him with a knife, instead of sendin' him off in a boat? I was a natural born idiot, not to have done so; but it is not too late yet—no! it's not too late yet!" and the villain's hands were clinched tightly together.

"Deadwood Dick and this Doctor Death-Grip are one and the same person. There's no doubt in my mind about that any longer. It was Death-Grip who robbed me, and whose voice I have twice heard. He has come here with but one motive—revenge! Curse him! curse him! He must, he *shall* die, before he does any further mischief!

"There will be a meeting at the tall elm, to-night; then Death-Grip's doom *must* be sealed. Lots must be drawn to see who kills the devil, and he who gets the prize must do the job at once, under penalty of death!"

When he left the office, that afternoon, he re-locked the safe, and went out about the camp, but made no mention of the robbery. Indeed, by his cheerful appearance, no one would have suspected that he had recently parted with the large sum of twenty thousand dollars.

For was he aware that he was regarded with the greatest curiosity by every one he chanced to meet, and people even turned around to look at him, with strange nods of the head.

Finally, however, he was brought to a realization that something was the matter, when, on meeting Smoky Sam face to face, that individual stopped and stared at his partner in crime, with an ejaculation of astonishment.

"Well! what are ye gaping at?" Old Mark demanded, irritated by the other's manner. "D'ye see anything green?"

"No, but I see something red," Smoky chuckled. "Where'd you get it?"

Old Mark turned white in an instant.

"What do you mean?" he gasped.

"I mean that you're marked just the same like me an' Cal Clinton," replied Smoky. "Ye don't mean to say ye didn't know et?"

The old intriguer made no reply, but rushed into a saloon near at hand, and took a look at himself in the glass.

Then a low cry of horror came from his lips.

Sure enough, there, in bold relief upon his neck, was the fatal word, in crimson letters:

"Doomed!"

He indeed was now as much of a marked man as either Cal Clinton or the proprietor of the Cocktail Casino.

And worse—he had both been robbed and branded.

The shock of this last discovery was too much for his nervous system, and, with a groan of anguish, he fell to the floor in a fit.

## CHAPTER XI.

### DEATH-GRIP AND QUEEN CLARIBEL.

DOCTOR DEATH-GRIP was lounging about the office of the Cinnamon Bear Hotel, late that afternoon, enjoying a cigar, and equally enjoying the distrustful curiosity with which every one seemed to regard him, when an office boy handed him a sealed envelope, on which was simply written, "Dr. Death-Grip," in a lady's hand.

Not without considerable surprise, the Doctor opened the envelope, and drew forth a daintily perfumed sheet of paper, when his eyes fell upon the following:

"DR. DEATH-GRIP:—

"DEAR SIR:—The lady magician respectfully requests an interview with you, in the parlor up-stairs. "QUEEN CLARIBEL."

Doctor Death-Grip smiled as he put the note away in his pocket.

"The very opportunity I most desire!" he muttered. "Ma belle Queen, you shall be accommodated. Of course you shall. I would not disappoint so charming a creature for worlds!"

He immediately arose, and went up-stairs to the ladies' parlor, and found the Queen awaiting him.

She arose and greeted him with a pleasant smile, and bade him be seated near her.

She was attired in a plain but tasty brown



silk dress, and with becomingly arranged hair, was certainly, as Death-Grip had privately observed, during the perusal of her letter, a most charming creature.

When they were seated, the lady magician said:

"I presume, sir, you were considerably surprised at the reception of my note requesting an interview?"

"More delighted than surprised, by all odds!" Death-Grip pleasantly assured. "I have been watching for an opportunity to speak with you for several hours."

"Indeed? Wherefore?"

"On a matter concerning you personally. But first, tell me of what service I can be?"

"Well, really I—I don't know. I—I wanted to know if you intend to remain in this place for a week or two?"

"I shall be here for a considerable length of time, most likely."

"Well, you see, sir, I have in my possession some important papers, relating to a valuable fortune that rightfully belongs to me. Should these papers fall into the hands of a certain person, I would lose the inheritance."

"I see," Death-Grip replied. "You fear you will lose them?"

"Yes. The man, Calvin Clinton, whom you so kindly rescued me from last night, would give much to possess the papers, and he is such an abominable wretch that, now that he has found out I am here, I fear he will make another attempt to get them from me."

"You are quite right in believing that, dear lady. Clinton does intend to try to obtain the papers by fair means or foul."

"How do you know?" and Queen Claribel looked eagerly at her caller.

"I will tell you. By chance, this afternoon, I overheard a conversation that interested me, for it not only concerned you but also concerned another party. The conversation took place between Calvin Clinton and a clerical-looking individual who is known in the camp as the Reverend Obadiah Long."

"Go on!" Claribel said, betraying her deep interest.

"Well, among other things, I found that these two men had a conspiracy on foot, in which you were concerned. Just its exact nature I could not learn, but I formed the idea that it related to a property matter, which they were trying to cheat you out of."

"Your idea, in the main, was correct, sir. I do not know who Obadiah Long is, but I do know that Cal Clinton is a despicable villain."

"I do not doubt it, miss, and I am, therefore, the more interested in you. The cuss—pardon the expression—had better not seek to molest you while I'm about, or he will get a worse choking than he got last night. Is it your desire, miss, to place your papers in my hands for safe-keeping during your stay here?"

"Yes, sir—that is, I was going to ask you if you would just as lief take charge of them for me. You appear like an honorable man, and I think I can trust you."

"You can, implicitly, my dear lady; and if you would go still further, and tell me your story, I think I could be of good service to you."

"My story, sir?"

"Yes, for I am convinced that you have an interesting history."

Queen Claribel hesitated a moment.

"I have a history," she finally said; "but, just how interesting it would be to you, I do not know. However, I don't mind telling you of myself, providing you treat what I tell you confidentially."

"You can depend upon that. I would be the last person in the world to betray a confidence."

"Well, I will trust you, for you are the only one in this place I feel I can trust."

"Some twenty years ago there were married, in an Eastern State, a couple named Anthony Harding and Lucille Lavelle. Harding was a well-to-do young farmer of good family, while the girl he married, belonged to a true Gypsy family, who had settled down to domestic life in the neighborhood."

"The match was not a happy one, for where the farmer was ambitious and industrious, his wife was right the opposite, and of an irritable and exacting nature. They lived together—a wrangling sort of life—for five years, and then Lucille disappeared, and Anthony Harding secured a divorce for abandonment."

"Soon after, he sold his farm, and moved to a Western State, where he invested in a tract of land, on which a town eventually sprung up, and his fortune was made."

"Two children had been born to him, of his

union with Lucille, they being twin girls. Soon after prosperity began to smile upon him in the West, Anthony Harding died, leaving his fortune to his daughters, and appointing his brother, Hurlburt Harding, guardian over the children, and administrator of the estate."

"The will was a remarkably singular one. It instructed the guardian to educate, clothe and feed the children out of the revenues derived from the estate, and to see that both were well married, ere they reached the age of nineteen—the guardian to use discretion in choosing husbands."

"In case either girl should refuse to marry the object of the guardian's choice before her nineteenth birthday, she was to be cut off with a dollar, and the fortune was to go to the girl who had accepted of a husband."

"The guardian was authorized to convert the estate into money, and on the nineteenth birthday of the twins, they were to receive the fortune, one, or severally, as the case might be."

"In case neither were married, the fortune was to be invested in Government bonds, and of the income from them, two-thirds was to go to a charitable institution and one-third to be divided between the girls."

"A very strange will, I should say!" Doctor Death-Grip observed.

"Yes, it was. But our father was a strange man."

"Well, about a year after father's death, Luke Lavelle, my mother's brother, came to my guardian, and, in the interest of his sister, demanded the custody of her children. Of course our guardian refused to give us up, and a quarrel ensued, during which our guardian was shot, but not fatally injured, while Luke Lavelle made his escape, and could nowhere be found."

"About a week later, however, my sister, Helen, was mysteriously stolen away, and the crime was most naturally laid to Luke Lavelle. The matter was placed in the hands of the proper authorities, and detectives set to work; but, though my guardian spent a large sum of money, and several years of active search passed, no trace of Helen or Luke Lavelle could be found, nor has there even been, since."

"A Mississippi River steamer was burned, a few days after the abduction, and the detectives finally decided that Helen and Lavelle had lost their lives on that boat."

"I was brought up under Hurlburt Harding's watchful eye, and given a fine education. I never wanted for anything, and it was only when I arrived at the age of seventeen that my troubles began. Then it was that my uncle informed me that I was old enough to marry, and that he had selected a husband for me."

"The person he had selected was a flashy, good-looking individual, Calvin Clinton by name, who was said to be financially well fixed, and who was quite a society favorite; but I didn't like him, from the first, and so told uncle, but he wouldn't listen to me, and said I must like him, and marry him. I declared I wouldn't, and then, as you may suppose, there was war in the household."

"Clinton persisted in thrusting his attentions upon me until they became obnoxious, and uncle, began a siege of alternate coaxing and threatening, until affairs became unbearable. I stood it for a year, with the best grace I could; but, finally, I made up my mind I would stand it no longer, not if I never got a penny of my father's fortune!"

"I admire your grit," interposed her much interested listener.

"Well, while finishing my education, I had learned to be a clever sleight-of-hand performer, and doubted not but what I could earn my own living. So, suddenly, and without warning, I took French leave. And when I left, I took my father's will, and a few papers of minor importance."

"Since then, I have traveled through the various mining districts, giving entertainments with uniform success, and feeling quite secure, until I met Calvin Clinton here last night!"

"What was your object in bringing your father's will with you, Miss—Miss Harding, I presume?"

"Yes. My true name is Edith Harding. The reason I have brought the will with me, in my travels, I should think would be obvious. If I should get married, before to-morrow night, six o'clock, to Cal Clinton, of course I would naturally come into the whole fortune. But, of course I shall not do anything of the kind. If it goes over my nineteenth birthday, I shall destroy this will!"

Doctor Death-Grip whistled, softly.

"But, why?" he interrogated.

"Because, then no will can be found when

I am of legal age. In the absence of any will or testament, I am of course the legal heiress to half of my father's estate in case my sister should come forward. If she should not come forward, then, of course the whole fortune comes to me!"

"But, haven't you overlooked one little point?" queried the listener.

"What is it?"

"This will of your father's—was it ever recorded? It must have been, or Hurlburt Harding could not have legally assumed your guardianship, and administration of your estate!"

"The will was duly recorded."

"Then, the records would show the truth, the same as though you did not destroy the will."

Edith laughed.

"Oh! no!" she replied. "I've looked into all that, long ago. The court house at S—, was burned to the ground, and all the records destroyed, and the recorder and his clerks, have all died. No will of my father's can ever be proven now, without my consent!"

"Well, you're as good as a Chicago lawyer, and have got everything your own way. But what does Cal Clinton want of the will?"

"I have only one theory, and that is that Clinton has found my sister, got into her good graces, and if he can secure the will, he will marry her before the hour she is nineteen. Thus, being a favorite with Hurlburt Harding, he will have married into the fortune."

"Clinton knows the contents of the will?"

"Yes, perfectly; otherwise the scoundrel would not bother me."

"In case it was Luke Lavelle who kidnapped your sister, did he know what was in the will?"

"I think not; I presume, Gypsy-like, he worked for revenge."

"I don't suppose you would know this Lavelle, if you were to see him?"

"Oh! no. You know I was only a toddling child then."

Doctor Death-Grip reflected a moment.

"Who is the colonel?" he asked.

"Why, that is Hurlburt Harding. What of him?"

"I heard his name mentioned, in the conversation between Clinton and Obadiah Long."

"What did they say about him?"

"Clinton observed that he would arrive in camp, most probably, to-night."

Edith sprang to her feet, consternation depicted upon her pretty face.

"He coming here?" she gasped. "Then, I must not lose a moment; I must leave the place at once!"

"Nothing of the sort," Doctor Death-Grip decided for her. "Sit down, Miss Harding, and listen to me. You have made me, nearly a stranger to you, your confidant; you have trusted me, and you have won my heartiest friendship. You knew not who I was; I might have been your worst enemy. I am your friend however, and when I say I am a person's friend, that person need never wish to have a truer one. You do not see me as myself. These whiskers, and this hair are all false. Once removed, you would see an altogether different looking man. I did not come here without a purpose. I came for vengeance! And before I depart, those who did me a bitter—terrible wrong—they shall know the unrelenting Death-Grip. You say you have traveled through the mining districts, Miss Harding. Were you ever up Bozeman way?"

"Yes, indeed! I spent a full month there."

"Did you ever hear of a wild sort of fellow, a detective, a friend to friends, and foe to foes, and yet, withal, a man of honor, who rambled around under the *nom de plume* of Deadwood Dick, Junior?"

Edith's pretty face plainly showed her surprise.

"Why, yes," she said. "I've often heard of the person—not only at Bozeman, but in various other camps in different territories."

"You never heard any good of him, I'll wager!"

"On the contrary I have always heard that he was more sinned against than sinning!" Edith replied, "that he did good rather than evil."

"Well, that's queer! But, be that as it may, Miss Harding, you have made a wise move in offering to place your father's will in my hands. By your confidence I have been able to see clear through a diabolical conspiracy. You are in an unenviable position, and in serious need of a friend. To possess that will between now and to-morrow night Cal Clinton would raise heaven and earth, if he could. He will tax the ingenuity of Satan himself to get possession of it, too!"

"Then take it and keep it for me!" Edith cried. "Oh! dear, what shall I do? I am here



alone, among strangers, and my enemies are closing in around me! Oh! I shall lose, after all!"

"No! Miss Harding, you shall not!" the man of broadcloth declared, rising and folding his arms across his chest. "You have one friend, and one that will stand by you to the last—a man who neither fears death nor Satan and all his imps. And that friend is before you!"

"Oh! Doctor Death-Grip, I believe you. You will really—"

"Nay! no longer Doctor Death-Grip to you, but Richard Bristol, otherwise Deadwood Dick, Junior."

"Deadwood Dick, Junior! Can it be possible?"

"Quite so. But I trust you will keep the fact secret. Now, Miss Harding, you have given me the will, and it is safe. Nevertheless I will not disguise the fact that you are in need of a friend with a strong arm to back you. You've got a pair of wolves to fight, and without a man of nerve to defend you, you certainly will lose. From what you have told me, and from what I have learned from other sources, I have fathomed the case in its entirety; have even a better understanding of it than you yourself. Now, I will carry you through the storm, which I am sure is impending, and bring you out into smooth waters, triumphant. I have no charge to make for doing this—no fees to exact. I only want you to do one thing!"

"Name it! name it! I will do almost anything reasonable and honorable. To defeat the scheming of that wretch, Cal Clinton—why, I would even marry some—"

"Nay! speak not the words!" Death-Grip quickly interrupted. "They are uncalled for. I know what you would say—can read your thoughts clearly. Although the prize would be worth the earnest wooing of any honorable man, jewels bright were designed to belong where jewels will shine the prettiest and purest!"

Edith flushed to the temples at this and seemed almost ready to burst into tears, when Death-Grip came quick to her relief again.

"Tut! tut," Miss Harding. "Don't for an instant infer that I thought you would demean yourself by some rash act. But, listen! I have only a few more minutes to tarry here, if I am going to defend your interests. Now, what I want you to do, is this. Give everything into my charge, and let me manage matters, and if you will, I'll give you my word as a gentleman, that I will pull you through, defeat your enemies, and you will get what is justly yours."

"Oh! yes! yes! You shall have the privilege of doing whatever you think best, and I will be entirely governed by your judgment and wishes. But, oh! sir, how shall I ever be able to repay you for all this kindness?"

"I'm not on the hire!" Death-Grip replied, with a faint smile. "When I take a hand in a game like this, I play for the honor of defeating villainy."

"Shall I appear at the Casino to-night?"

"The man of broadcloth reflected a moment."

"Yes," he said, finally, "providing you don't see or hear from me again in the mean time. You go on, at nine?"

"Yes, that is as I have arranged."

"Well, probably I shall know more, soon, and will keep you posted. You had better not go down-stairs until it is time for you to go to the Casino. I will leave you now. Be brave, and let nothing alarm you, for I will be near you, when, perhaps, you least expect it!"

They shook hands, cordially, and Doctor Death-Grip went to his own room, Edith soon following to hers, which adjoined that of the man of broadcloth.

## CHAPTER XII. SISTER VS. SISTER.

EVERYTHING was plain enough to Death-Grip now. Where, before, he had known nothing for certain in regard to the conspiracy, he now saw it all as plainly as though it had already transpired.

In the first place, no doubt, Calvin Clinton, adventurer that he was, had heard of the singular will of Anthony Harding, and set to work to win one of the heiresses of the big fortune; by careful research he had found out that one heiress was missing, and had, therefore, first laid siege for the hand of Edith.

Failing here, he had cast about him, and by some lucky chance had discovered that Myra was the missing twin sister, and if he could marry her and secure and destroy the Harding will, he was accomplishing his purposes.

That Myra Warring was in reality Helen Harding, Deadwood Dick now had not a doubt, and if she was, it stood to reason that Mark

Warring really was Luke Lavelle, the uncle of the Harding children.

Death-Grip sat in his room, silent and thoughtful for nearly an hour.

"Here is a grand chance for revenge," he mused. "If I were inclined to take advantage of it by playing my cards right, I could keep Myra, otherwise Helen, out of any portion of the fortune. But that would be dishonorable—ay, dirty, mean. She has never, personally, done me any harm, and I would in reality be revenging myself upon her instead of the old demon, Warring."

"To be candid, I don't believe the old scoundrel knows anything about the peculiar construction of the will. That a will exists he no doubt is aware, but supposes that the sisters will share equally and alike, and is holding Myra back until she is of age, when he will push her forward. If he knew of the terms of the will as it now exists, he'd have made a noise, and a big one, too, long ere this. Cal Clinton is the chap who is playing the bluff hand in the game. Wonder who the old curmudgeon is who is standing in with him in the guise of Obadiah Long? His father, maybe. I hardly know where to begin at to go to work on this matter. I'd like to see Colonel Hurlburt Harding before I make any positive move."

In this strain it was the detective's thoughts ran.

Finally, he arose and put on his hat, preparatory to going down-stairs, when he heard a rap on the door of the adjoining room, which was, although unknown to him, Edith's.

Curiosity impelled him to wait a moment, for the partitions between the two rooms were thin, and he could easily hear anything that was said in the next room.

Not that he had any predisposition for eavesdropping, but intuition seemed to stay his footsteps.

The knock upon the door was speedily answered; then the voice of the party in the hall interrogated:

"Are you the one who does the tricks at the Casino?"

Death-Grip recognized the voice at once, and drew nearer to the partition. It was the voice of Myra Warring.

"I am Queen Claribel, if that is who you have reference to!" Edith Harding answered.

"You're the one!" Miss Warring assented.

"Can I have a few minutes talk with you?"

"Certainly. Step inside."

Then, the door closed, and the man of many disguises heard the two ladies become seated.

Myra Warring was the first to speak:

"You are engaged at the Casino place, in the capacity of a variety girl, I believe?" Miss Warring said.

"I am performing at the Casino, madam, as a lady magician!" Edith returned, haughtily.

"Oh! as a lady magician. You will excuse me, I am sure, for I am not very well posted, on such matters, and was not aware that ladies were admissible to the sanctity of rum-shops. Do you intend remaining long, here?"

"One week is the time I am engaged for, but I can not say how much longer I shall remain, madam!"

"Miss, if you please!" Miss Warring corrected. "I presume you don't get much pay in such a small town as this, do you?"

"A hundred dollars a week, and hotel expenses. I never work for less."

"Indeed!"

This surprised Myra. It had never been her good fortune to have a hundred dollars in her pocket, at one time, in her life.

"Why, that is wonderful money, for a puppet show. Young lady, how much will you ask, to cancel your engagement, here, and leave for some other place?"

Edith's spirit of resentment flashed in her eyes.

"I would not cancel my engagement under any consideration," she retorted. "I have all the money I need, but have no cause or desire to cancel my engagement or to permit any person to interfere in any way with my affairs."

This reply caused Myra Warring to flush with anger.

"You are very sharp-tongued, for one of your sort!" she sneered.

"Just as sharp-tongued as you, and of equally as good a sort, if not better!" Edith returned.

"If you came here to show the disagreeable side of your nature you are unwelcome. By turning the knob of the door yonder you can easily find a mode of egress!"

In the next room, Doctor Death-Grip felt like giving a war-whoop of approval.

"I am not ready to go yet," Myra responded

decidedly. "I have come here to talk business with you, and genuine business, too. You are an imposter. Your name is not Queen Claribel!"

"My professional name is Queen Claribel!"

"Oh! your professional name! A fine profession you have, for one of your sex!"

"As long as it suits me, I don't know that it is any of your business!" was the prompt retort.

"Oh! of course, it's none of my business," Myra acquiesced. "I don't want it to be; but, you see, I know who you are. I chanced to be awaiting the arrival of a friend, in a room adjoining the parlor, when you had an interview with that interesting individual who seeks to create a terrific impression by styling himself Doctor Death-Grip. I heard all that passed between you, and now know you both, in your true colors."

"Yes? Well, were you interested, particularly?" queried Edith, maintaining the utmost composure.

"I was, indeed."

"Then, I should infer, you being so much interested, that you are the affianced of Calvin Clinton?"

"I am."

"Accordingly, I presume you will allege that you are my twin sister, whom Luke Lavelle kidnapped, many years ago?"

"Exactly. If there is any proof in the story you told that distinguished ruffian, Doctor Death-Grip, I am undoubtedly your sister Helen—*unfortunately* your sister. Only today I refused to marry Clinton on account of the affair of last night, in which this death-gripper gave him a specimen of his ruffian accomplishments, but now that I see through it all I shall marry Clinton at the earliest moment. I do not care for him, particularly, but I do care for the fortune—not half, but the whole. You, by your own admission, have been scheming to possess this fortune. The man you refused, my high-toned sister, I will take. And you, well, you can go on giving your bar-room entertainments forever, for all I care!"

Miss Warring then arose.

And Edith Harding arose also, and, with deep feeling, spoke:

"Madam, I beg you will not call again. Had you come to me as a sister you should have found a sister's affection awaiting you. But, you came as an enemy to your kith and kin; you came for a mercenary purpose and have dared to insult me, needlessly and wickedly. You are the Gypsy Lavelle. I am the Harding. Go your way and marry that knave Clinton. I only hope you will. But, rest assured, I will win, now—after all that has passed between us. I will win, if only to thwart you and your most detestable ally!"

"Ha, ha! What a queen you are!" and Myra laughed derisively.

"What are your sneers to me? I do not know you. No one knows you! Who are you? You have no proof of who you are. You cannot even prove you are Helen Harding. Go! Do your worst. The door is at your disposal. Go!"

"Yes! I will go. But, remember, bar-room beauty, you have not heard the last of me. You think your newly acquired friend, the detested Death-Grip, will help you out, but it is a vain hope. When it becomes known that Death-Grip is the notorious desperado, Deadwood Dick, he will be seized by a grip that will never relent, until the last breath is out of his body. Farewell, fair sister! Magic will never save you now. The fortune of our father is mine, for I shall marry Calvin, and all your sleight-of-hand tricks and subtle scheming will never reach it!"

Myra swept haughtily from the room, banging the door after her.

While Edith, brave to the last, but now overcome by the intense excitement grew sick and faint, and fell unconscious on the floor.

It was several minutes ere she recovered consciousness; then she awoke to the fact that she was lying upon her bed, and that the detective, Doctor Death-Grip, was bathing her forehead with a dampened handkerchief.

She started up, to a sitting position, in an instant.

"Where am I?" she gasped. "What has happened?"

Then, the interview with Myra rushed upon her mind, and she turned piteously to Death-Grip.

"Was it true? Oh! tell me *was* it true?" she faintly asked, "or have I been dreaming?"

"It was only too true, Miss Harding," was the quiet answer. "One whom I would have thought an angel, at such a crisis, proved herself unworthy of your respect. But you held



your own so bravely that I admire you more than words can express. Though enemies surround you, be of brave heart, for the end is not one you need to dread."

"Oh! God! what have I ever done, to merit all this persecution? All my friends and relatives are leagued against me, even my own sister; not a friend in all the world have I."

"Edith!" and his voice was one of reproof.

"Pardon me, Mr. Bristol! You are the only friend I have left!" and the disheartened girl burst into tears, and wept bitterly—as only those can weep who know what utter loneliness means.

"There, dear lady, do not grieve so. I assured you I was your friend, and I repeat the assurance that you cannot have a truer one. I will fight you through the battle, Edith—Miss Harding—if I have to clean out every enemy you have—man or woman. So, now cheer up."

"Oh! you are so kind! But you don't know what she threatened. In defending me, you are putting yourself in deadly personal peril. She knows who you are, and she will set every one against you, and—and—"

"And every one that runs against me will get hurt," was the grim reply. "Fear not, Miss—"

"Call me Edith, please."

"Fear not, Edith. I heard every word that passed between you, and laughed to myself at her threat against me. Don't let the least thought of that disturb you. You don't half know me yet. I fear none of them, and well they know it. Ere now, I've defied a whole town. All will turn out right, and even should we fail, no harm shall come to you, certainly not so long as I live to defend you."

"But I am unnecessarily disturbing you. Keep quietly to your room, have your meals sent up, or I will; admit no one, and if inquiry is made from the Casino, announce that you are ill and unable to appear to-night. In the mean time I won't be far away."

"Will you carry my father's will with you?"

"Oh! no. Don't fear about that. I will fix it so that should I get jerked up to a tree-limb, the will will be returned safely to you."

"Oh! Mr. Bristol, don't—please don't imperil your life now. I full well know you are brave, fearless, noble, honorable and self-sacrificing. God forbid you should ever come to harm on my account. But you are not going?"

"Yes. There is work ahead for me, and I had best be looking after it."

"Oh! I am afraid to have you go. I do not fear for myself, for I have a pistol and know how to use it. But you—"

"There, don't worry about me, Miss Edith, for though we are fairly in the storm now, there's clear weather ahead, as sure as my name is Deadwood Dick, the younger! So good-by! and be of brave heart and shoot the first one who dares to enter your room!"

"Good-by! my best friend—my brother!"

She flung her arms about his neck and kissed him; then, he gently released himself, and turned and left the room.

His thoughts were confused, almost agonizing—were of poor Nola, pure and true as an angel, and lying beneath the sod kissed by a semi-tropic sun—of Edith, pure and persecuted and alone in the world, and he the only man in the world upon whom she leaned!

#### CHAPTER XIII.

##### THE CONSPIRATORS AGAIN.

It was sunset, and work for the day was done.

No longer were picks, shovels and pans in use; no longer, for that day, would the earth-jarring, rock-disturbing blasts of giant powder send their dull roars through the Pocket that only a few short weeks before had been almost an eternal solitude.

The miners came flocking into camp, heartily glad that their labors for the day were over, and soon, after a general "wash-up and a bite of grub," the only thoroughfare of "Deadwood Dick's Diggings," which was the stage trail passing the Cinnamon Bear Hotel, presented a lively appearance.

About a hundred yards to the south of where the original Deadwood Dick, Jr., cabin stood—now altered into the Cocktail Casino—was a small but densely matted motte of trees and undergrowth, in whose center was a little clearing, which Dick had specially fixed for an emergency retreat and where his and poor Nola's noonday after-dinner hour was oftentimes spent. Many a happy moment they had passed there together, until a scourge-stricken stranger had wandered into the Pocket, died, and infected them with that dread disease, small-pox.

To-night, when the main street of the Diggings

began to "blossom," and assume a festal appearance, two men sat in the clearing, upon a rude but comfortable settee, which Dick's own hands had constructed for his "bower."

They were Calvin Clinton and his superannuated acquaintance, the Rev. Obadiah Long.

"I think everything will be right in the morning," Clinton was saying. "Old Mark promised me again, an hour ago, that he would exert his utmost influence to force matters. Oh! she'll get over her miff, will Myra, when she thinks I'm going away! She's dead stuck on me, that I know."

"Don't you be too sure about that, my son. These young women are rantankerous things to deal with, sometimes."

"No need to preach *that* to me; I reckon I ought to know that. But, I'll tell you one thing, dad, if I could have got Edith, you'd seen a different man made out of me from what I am now."

"Humph!"

"No humph! about it. I loved that girl, honestly and honorably, and if she had taken me on the risk—"

"What then?"

"I'd have made her a good, faithful, loving husband, and—"

"Thrown your poor old father aside, eh? He who has schemed so long to make you a man among men—you would have thrown him aside?"

There was a brief silence. Then the answer came:

"Yes! *I would!* She was as pure as an angel, and, had you not been constantly hounding at my heels, making me morose, sullen and irritable—not by any means like my natural self—I think I could have won her. But *you*—why, you have made a devil out of me. You, a father, the devil;—I, the son, a chip from the block!"

Obadiah Long laughed harshly.

"You're a fool!" he growled. "I predicted you would be an emissary of evil from your infancy. You never was like me, but always like your mother—weak, peevish, lacking of nerve and ambition, and in fact worthless—good-for-nothing. Would that I stood in your shoes to-night; you bet I'd not let a fat fortune slip out of my hands because of a lack of nerve to grab it."

"Very true, you are the older rogue of the two of us," retorted the son, "but if I haven't more stamina on the tip end of my toe-nails than you have in the whole of your body, I'll sell out, and you can bargain with a doctor for my cadaver."

"If I'm not mistaken, a certain doctor has got a license on your carcass already," the elder returned, with cutting irony.

Which elicited an oath from Clinton.

"If you want to get off any of your facetious biz, you'd better go over to the Casino, and hitch up with the charming Ma'm'selle Queen Claribel," he sneered. "What do you want of me here, anyhow? I've got an engagement for to-night."

"Will your engagement pay you, Calvin?"

"Pay? For God's sake, will you ever let up on the *pay*? The whole consuming desire of your life seems to be money. Bah! I'm tired and sick of it. I've never heard anything else since I was a boy. You make me sometimes forget that I am a human being. Why, to have done with your everlasting harping, I'd marry the ugliest old hag, and all my life hoe potatoes alongside a railroad track. Now I shall act for myself; so don't hound me any more; it will do no good. I'm going. And he arose from the bench."

"Not yet, Calvin; don't go. I am speaking for your own benefit. I'll acknowledge I ain't as much of a church member as I used to be, but if I've ever committed a sin—and I don't think I ever have—it was for your sake. You are my son, and although I don't expect to hang out long here below, I want to leave you in tolerable good circumstances. Now, Calvin, *did* you ever know me to tell a lie?"

"Never, but once, dad," Calvin replied, with mock solemnity, "and that was all the time."

"Which isn't so bad as a joke. But, Calvin, all jokin' an' sparrin' aside, there's work to be done this night, an' that's what we're here for to arrange," the old sinner said, with a show of ugly decision.

"What work?" Clinton growled. "That's what I've been waiting to find out."

"I will tell you," was Obadiah's answer. "You know where the three blasted pines are, that I called your attention to one day?"

"Yes."

"Well, the stage passes there to-night, as near as I can find out, about ten o'clock, and

will reach the Diggings half an hour later. On the stage comes Colonel Hurlburt Harding. He must not strike this camp until you and Myra are married."

"Bah! She'll not marry me. She told me so, flat!"

"And she told me, *flatter*, that she had reconsidered the case, and was ready to wed you the first thing in the mornin'!"

"Dad, you're lying—as usual."

"Not a bit of it! I saw her not ten minutes before I came here."

"Why didn't you tell me that in the first place? What about the stage?"

"We must stop it at the pines and secure Harding. Of course, we'll be in disguise. I know of a cave near by, where he can be kept a prisoner for a few days, until you and Myra are married. If he comes to-night and ascertains who Warring is, the jig is up. So, be at the three blasted pines by nine o'clock, and your poor old father will make your fortune for you, my boy."

"I'll be there!"

"Come disguised, mind you, and well armed, for we may have to fight."

"Oh, I understand that. Now I must be going."

"And so must I."

The two arose and left the hidden glade.

While a person who had overheard their conversation chuckled softly to himself.

Doctor Death-Grip had been their unseen guest.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### SISTER VS. SISTER!

At eight o'clock that evening a party of twelve men stood close in the vicinity of the tall elm.

This meeting-place, as once before stated, was at the extreme southern end of the Pocket, the tree in question, a tall, gaunt growth, being the only one in the immediate vicinity, and some distance from the mining-camp.

The moon shed its effulgent light down upon the scene.

Eleven men were formed in a semicircle, and before them, and facing them, stood the speaker of the occasion, Calvin Clinton.

The other people of the crowd were Mark Warring, Smoky Sam, Horatio Hornblower, Ben Bungstarter, and seven other as tough-looking characters as could be found in any settlement or mining-camp in the West.

Clinton was speaking:

"Boys!" he said, "we have congregated here, as a representative delegation of the people, to discuss a subject concerning our personal welfare."

"You all know me, and that I have been here since the camp sprung into existence, and I'll allow you will all admit that I've conducted myself as a fair, square man!"

Applause!

"Within the scope of my remembrance, I have never done an uncivil or unlawful act; nor have I ever harmed anybody. Nevertheless, a maa has made his appearance in the Diggings, who has not only insulted me without cause, but has marked me for life."

"The same applies to our friend, Warring, and also to Smoky Sam. This man, who styles him Doctor Death-Grip, which of course is an assumed name, has come here with the evident intention of bullying the whole town, and I think I have solved who he is, without a doubt."

"With one or two exceptions, you men are of the originals of our party who first came to this Pocket. You will remember we found only a solitary patient, in a solitary cabin, suffering from small-pox. While the main body of us went into camp, Warring and Smoky volunteered to care for the sick man. When they returned to camp they stated that he had died, and they had buried him, afterwards pointing to a mound."

"I doubted this, and always have, and only recently have learned that instead of dying, he was sent down-stream in an open boat. He did not perish, but has come back to the Diggings in the guise of a sport, to visit vengeance upon us. This Death-Grip is the man, and our lives are in deadly peril."

"Now, the question is, shall we stand idle and become marked for life, and mayhap murdered by this devil, or shall we join together and put him forever out of the way?"

"Kill him!" came the answer, in chorus, and in savage tones. "Kill the cuss!"

"Just so! But that's likely to be easier said



than done. There's not a man in camp but what stands in fear of him. I'll admit, that while I'm no coward, I'd hesitate to tackle him, single-handed, and I reckon the rest of you would do the same.

He's quick, strong, and no doubt an expert with weapons. The grip of his hand is something awful. For one man to try to master him, would be the height of foolhardiness. Who wants to tackle him, single-handed?"

"Not me, I'll swear," cried Mark Warring.

"Nor me!" grunted Horatio Hornblower. "I've got enough!"

"And I should beg to say that devil a bit do I want wid the job!" declared Ben Bungstarter, while Smoky Sam uttered an oath, and the others of the party remained silent.

"Well, what's to be done?" demanded Clinton. "The fellow has got to be killed, or he'll kill us, and the job has got to be attended to to-night. Who's got any plan to suggest?"

"Most likely ther cuss will be at the Casino, to-night, to see the magic gail!" remarked Smoky, "an' when no one ain't looking, some one could give him a dig in the back. Ther crowd wouldn't interfere, you bet!"

"But, who's going to take the responsibility of doing it?"

"I've an idea," spoke Warring. "We'll draw lots to see who's elected to do the job, and to the one who draws the prize, I'll personally give five hundred dollars when the job's done."

"Yes, and I'll increase the amount to a thousand," added Cal. Clinton. "What say you, gents? The man who kills Doctor Death-Grip, to-night, gets a thousand dollars."

"I'm agreeable!" assented Smoky Sam. "A thousand dollars is a snug pile, an' with it I can start in on some new lay. I'm agreeable to ther proposition."

While the others expressed their approval by grunts of assent.

"Very well. So it shall be then," assented Warring. "I will cut eleven stalks of grass of an even length, and one shorter. The man who gets the short spear is elected to kill Doctor Death-Grip, at the Casino, to-night. And death be to him if he fails! Are you agreeable, boyees?"

"We are!" came the reply. "Go ahead!"

Accordingly, Mark Warring pulled several stalks of wire grass, and cut them, with one exception, into even lengths.

Then, there in the vivid moonlight, the men drew the lots that were to make one of them a murderer.

The lot fell to Smoky Sam.

"You're elected!" cried Warring, jubilantly. "You've got to salivate Death-Grip!"

"Yas, an' I ain't afeard ter do it, nuther. An' ef I don't get my thousan' dollars, some one else will get salivated, too!"

"You'll get your money ef I have to take it out of my own pocket!" declared Clinton. "So, now, go ahead, and do the work. The meeting is adjourned, and we'll all be present at the Casino, to see that the job's done up brown!"

"But, supposing some one shutes me?" queried Smoky. "Where'll I be, then?"

"Where you ought to have been, long ago—in perdition!"

It was a strange—a sepulchral voice, that uttered the words, and caused the conspirators to start in terror—then, break and run for dear life.

Guilty wretches that they were, they paused not to look behind, even to see who had given the words utterance.

Had they, they would have seen emerge from behind the very tree near which they had been grouped, a girlish figure, attired in black—no one else than Queen Claribel.

"So they will attempt to murder Doctor Death-Grip, will they?" she spoke aloud. "We shall see. Kind as he has been to me, I will give up my own life to save him—ay! a hundred times. Lucky it was I followed those base wretches hither. Now—"

"Now, what!"

Queen Claribel started back with a cry of surprise.

As suddenly as though risen from out the earth, she found herself confronted by one of her own sex, and that one, Myra Warring—her sister Helen!

In her hand Myra held a glittering dagger, and in her gleaming eyes, was the fire of rancorous hatred.

It was evident she was not there without a fixed—an awful purpose.

"Now! what?" she demanded, again. "Oh! you spy! you treacherous hussy! So you would take the part of a desperado, would you? You would defend one who would see me robbed

of what is justly mine? Then defend yourself against me, for I mean to kill you, to be rid of my worst enemy."

She advanced, with uplifted dagger, her eyes fairly scintillating in her rage.

Queen Claribel retreated quickly.

"Back!" she cried. "You come at your peril!"

But, Myra heeded her not. She rushed forward, with the fury of a tigress, and with dagger uplifted.

Even within striking distance of the Magic Queen, had she got, ere a crisis took place.

Then, Claribel suddenly drew a revolver, and, at instant aim, fired.

With a wild cry of anguish, Myra threw up her arms, staggered backward, and fell to the ground.

Without waiting to ascertain the result of the shot, Claribel turned, and hurried toward the mining-camp.

"I shot her!" she murmured, "but God knows, it was in defense of my own life. Now, I must away, to protect Deadwood Dick, for he indeed is in deadly peril. Ah me! I have a premonition that this night will see more than one life sacrificed. Oh, why was it decreed for me to come to this dreadful place?"

The stage arrived at the Diggings that night, earlier than usual, and unloaded its motley crowd of passengers.

Among them was a tall, handsome man, full bearded, and with a rather noble expression of countenance.

All flocked into the hotel, as soon as the stage stopped, and made application for accommodations, and among the first to register was this full-bearded man.

He signed his name, in a round graceful hand:

"COLONEL HARDING,"

without affixing the place from whence he came.

Standing near, at the time, was Doctor Death-Grip, who, noticing the signature, presently called the colonel aside, and engaged him in conversation.

For nearly an hour the two conversed, earnestly, and when the colonel arose to go in to supper, he grasped Dick cordially by the hand.

"My friend, I thank you!" he said. "You have opened up to me the fact of my own foolish blindness. Inasmuch as Helen was always my child, and my pet, in one sense, she shall have her rights, in defiance of the mandate of my brother's will. And, now, I want to see this devil, Luke Lavelle, and his associate Calvin Clinton. There will be trouble in this camp to-night, or I miss my guess. Yes I will be at the Casino, to-night!"

"And so will I!" mused Death-Grip, "but in another disguise, maybe!"

## CHAPTER XV.

### CONCLUSION.

AN unusually large crowd gathered at the Cocktail Casino, that night, for the exciting events of the previous night, coupled with the wide-spread rumor of Queen Claribel's powers of magic, had created an unexampled interest for the place.

Long before the hour for Claribel to appear, the saloon was packed, and, as usual, the bar did a rattling business, while the thirsty throats of the motley assemblage swallowed the bad medicine in large quantities.

Among the foremost customers was Smoky Sam, who poured down glass after glass of the stomach-destroying stuff, as if it had been so much water, and then, between times, paced to and fro, sullen, dark-browed, and uncommunicative.

Evidently, despite the prospect of a thousand dollars for Deadwood Dick's death, he was shaky and nervous lest he should fail, and be killed himself.

Not that he had any conscientious scruples about committing the heinous crime, but at heart he was an arrant coward.

Mark Warring and Cal Clinton were on hand at the hour when Claribel was to make her appearance, and eagerly they looked for the arrival of Death-Grip.

But, for some reason, Death-Grip did not materialize as promptly as they had hoped and expected.

What was the matter?

Were they to be disappointed, after so carefully laying their plans?

Promptly at nine o'clock the little curtain on the stage rung up, and Queen Claribel was seen, attired as on the previous night.

She had considerable more illusionary appara-

tus with her now than at the former exhibition, including two tables, instead of one.

Her appearance was greeted with a roar of applause, for, to the majority of the audience, she was "just pretty and sweet enough to eat."

But instead of beginning the performance at once, as was expected, she advanced to the stage front, carrying in her grasp a pair of self-cocking six-shooters.

At the front she paused, and looked over the audience, her face expressing cool resolution.

The crowd ceased their applause, and immediately a breathless silence reigned; then the Queen spoke:

"Gentlemen—that is, I am addressing such of you as are gentlemen—I have something to say, and beg your attention."

"I was engaged to come to your camp, to give you a pleasing entertainment of sleight-of-hand tricks, and I came. Last night I attempted to give my performance, but was finally forced to abandon it, owing to trouble in the place."

"To-night, it is doubtful if there will be any performance, because there is likely to be more trouble. The cause I will try to briefly explain."

"Last evening, a respectable gentleman's hat was snatched from his head, by the disreputable character in whose place I was employed to give these performances, namely Smoky Sam, and a row ensued, through which Smoky Sam nearly got the life choked out of him—which, I have since learned, would have served him right, if he had."

"The gentleman thus insulted is expected to drop in here, at any moment. He is called Doctor Death-Grip!"

Here she paused, and gave another searching look over the assemblage.

"To-night," she resumed, "I chanced to overhear a consultation between a parcel of ruffians, by which I learned of a cold-blooded conspiracy to murder this Doctor Death-Grip here, to-night, without any chance being given him for self-defense."

"There were twelve men in the conference I overheard, and lots were drawn to see who should commit the assassination. There was of course one man to whom the lot fell to commit the murder."

"The principals in this atrocious scheme are men who have neither heart or soul—are very beasts of prey. I know their names, but will not mention them, until I detect a movement to carry out this murder—then, by high Heaven, girl though I am, blood shall be spilled in this den."

"This is not bluff, but business! So beware! I have given fair warning! Death to the man who attempts to raise a disturbance here to-night! I shall now proceed with my performance!"

And, thrusting her weapons into a belt she wore about her waist, the intrepid girl turned coolly to her apparatus, and began to arrange it.

For several seconds the most intense quiet prevailed in the room, while a hundred pair of staring eyes were riveted in astonishment upon the magician.

Such nerve as this, on the part of a proverbially weak woman surpassed the comprehension of all present.

Even Smoky Sam gaped at her, speechless with rage and astonishment.

But, Queen Claribel went on with her little feats of legerdemain as coolly as if nothing had happened.

Presently, when her back was partly turned, there was a flash, a sharp report, and death leaped forth from the pistol of Smoky—death for Queen Claribel, for, with a groan, she sunk to the floor!

The next instant the report was answered by another from the pistol of Deadwood Dick, Junior, who had, in disguise, been present all the time, and Smoky Sam dropped to the floor.

Then a scene akin to pandemonium ensued, for, surrounded by all that desperate dozen of enemies, Deadwood Dick, Junior, was struggling to reach the stage, to rescue Claribel, if she were not indeed dead. Warring and Clinton were both upon him, backed by the two hummers and the Reverend Long—all apparently inspired with a frenzy of fury and trying to kill the man they had so dreaded. But, as each one raised his arm to shoot or strike, a shot from behind them saved Death-Grip, and when he finally reached the form of poor Claribel, Colonel Harding stood beside him, and his empty pistol told who it was that saved Deadwood Dick, Junior, from destruction.

Raising Claribel's inanimate form in his arm, Dick made his escape at the rear of the building.



followed by Colonel Harding, who had kept close at hand, as a rear guard to secure Death-Grip's safe retreat.

Even the lights had been extinguished, one after another; then a lamp exploded, and set fire to the dry frame-work, which blazed up rapidly, communicating with the roof, and in a short time the structure was a mass of flames.

Of course an immediate exodus took place among those who could escape. A vortex of wind had suddenly swept down into the valley, coming seemingly from all directions and carrying the sparks from roof to roof, and igniting them.

A dozen cabins were soon in flames, and soon all Deadwood Dick's Diggings was a scene of seething conflagration.

Verily, Deadwood Dick, Junior, had filled his measure of vengeance, or at least it had been filled for him!

The next morn dawned cold and gloomy, with a drizzling, dripping rain, and a raw, penetrating wind.

Two men stood upon a high eminence overlooking the valley Pocket.

Near by was some object covered over with a blanket. Its shape was that of a human form, and so it was. It was the lifeless remains of poor Helen Harding, *alias* Claribel.

The men were Colonel Harding and Deadwood Dick, Jr.—otherwise, Doctor Death-Grip.

The colonel was in tears.

"I have learned the saddest lesson of my life, sir," he said. "How bitterly do I repent I ever tried to induce poor Edith to wed the miscreant, Clinton. But for that, she would now be alive. I can never forgive myself."

"I truly sympathize with you, colonel, for I know she was a treasure; but, treasures here below we all must part with, and perhaps it were better she died in her virgin youth. Below you, you see a town in ruins, with houseless people huddling together this chill morning with no roofs to cover their heads. They stole what belonged to me, and this is their recompense! The town may rise again, Phenix-like, from its ashes, but if so, it shall fall. Not through my agency, but a curse is on the place that neither you nor I can eradicate.

"Come! let's bury our dead, and go our way, perhaps never to meet again."

They raised the body of poor Claribel and laid it away in a little cave near by; then, after walling up the opening with heavy bowlders to prevent wild animals from gaining entrance, they mounted horses which had been obtained, and rode sadly away.

The last act in the drama, so far as they were concerned, was finished—the finale to a tragedy of which it is a relief to write

THE END.

Edward L. Wheeler's

## Deadwood Dick Novels

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42. The Phantom Miner; or, Deadwood Dick's Bonanza.
49. Omaha Oil; or, Deadwood Dick in Danger.
57. Deadwood Dick's Eagles; or, The Pards of Flood Bar.
73. Deadwood Dick on Deck; or, Calamity Jane, the Heroine of Whoop-Up.
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100. Deadwood Dick in Leadville; or, A Strange Stroke for Liberty.
104. Deadwood Dick's Device; or, The Sign of the Double Cross.
109. Deadwood Dick as Detective.

121. Cinnamon Chip, the Girl Sport; or, The Golden Idol of Mount Rosa.
129. Deadwood Dick's Double; or, The Ghost of Gorgon's Gulch.
138. Blonde Bill; or, Deadwood Dick's Home Base.
149. A Game of Gold; or, Deadwood Dick's Big Strike.
156. Deadwood Dick of Deadwood; or, The Picked Party.
195. Deadwood Dick's Dream; or, The Rivals of the Road.
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221. Sugar Coated Sam; or, The Black Gowns of Grim Gulch.
232. Gold-Dust Dick.
263. Deadwood Dick's Divide; or, The Spirit of Swamp Lake.
268. Deadwood Dick's Death Trail; or, From Ocean to Ocean.
309. Deadwood Dick's Big Deal; or, The Gold Brick of Oregon.
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443. Deadwood Dick, Jr.; or, The Sign of the Crimson Crescent.
448. Nickel-Plate Ned; or, Deadwood Dick Jr's Defiance.
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